

Phobos

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Phobos

by [sugamins](#)

Summary

Several days have passed since the discovery of the newest victim of the gifted serial killer. Yoongi has been providing shelter to Jimin. He knows it's a bad idea. He knows that he will get too close and end up getting burned once more.

But how could he stay away?

Jimin is a raging fire, and Yoongi wants to stick his fingers right in the flames ...

Notes

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[Playlist](#)

This story contains dark and disturbing content. Please check the tags before reading the story.

Continuing the themes from part one, Katabasis, this story follows Yoongi, a now retired member of a disbanded squad of superheroes. The squad underwent extreme, military boot camp training to not only prepare them to fight crime, but to break their spirits in order to make them compliant so they would not cause trouble with their gifts in the future. It contains many references to the past physical, emotional, and mental abuse that the squad mates went through for many years, starting in childhood and spanning into adulthood.

This particular story references medical experimentation and how it affected the characters. Technically, the medical procedures they were forced to undergo could be classified as sexual violence and grievous bodily harm and so I want to give ample warning here. There are discussions about sterilisation.

For trans readers, there is also a discussion about a trans male character and pregnancy. Said character is not pregnant, but I want to warn about the potentially triggering content. I do not like pregnancy and graphic descriptions of it make me feel uncomfortable. The scene is brief and not detailed for this reason.

If you would like to skip that part of the scene, when you reach the line: Not havin' the legal right to parentage and all that?" ctrl+f search for the line: Yoongi hummed in agreement as he took his first sip of coffee.

If you are in any way affected by the issues in this story and it might trigger you, do not read it.

The rain was coming down as hard as ever.

As he stood on the stoop outside the store, Yoongi wondered if it was going to stop any time soon. He had a horrible feeling it wasn't going to do so. It was here to stay, much like it had for the previous days. But at least standing under the cover of the striped awning allowed him to smoke a much-craved cigarette.

Yoongi shoved the lighter down deep in his jeans pocket and then reached up to take hold of the stick. He took a couple of quick pulls on it to get the cherry smouldering, breathing the thin smoke out of his nose in hard exhales. Then he took a deep pull to fill his lungs at long last. He squinted through the lingering smoke to stare across the street.

There was a steady stream of traffic rolling up and down the road because it was the middle of the afternoon. But the raging rainstorm made it look closer to the evening. The sky was covered in a thick bank of clouds that blocked out all hints of sunlight. All the windows of the occupied buildings that he had passed had been glowing in shades of bright white and warm hues of orange and yellow. The streetlights would be coming on soon to provide much-needed illumination. Very few pedestrians were travelling on foot because of the terrible weather. Those that had no choice were wearing raincoats and had umbrellas. Hard gusts of wind threatened to drag the umbrellas straight out of their hands.

As he breathed smoke out the corner of his mouth, he watched a small gaggle of school children walking along the opposite side of the street. They were elementary school kids, clad in colourful and shiny raincoats that were much too big for them. They were skipping along the sidewalk to try and get home as fast as possible. Their galoshes stomped down in the puddles to kick up great splashes of rainwater.

Yoongi hovered his cigarette in front of his parted lips, his harsh squint softening as he studied the children. There was a small boy at the back of the gaggle, who was waddling along behind the other boys. For some reason, watching him dredged up memories of the past. Made him think about a certain chubby boy that had used to waddle after him in the hallways of their school-cum-home. The one that had told him he was stupid but had always needed to ask for his help with spelling.

A sudden bitter taste flooded his mouth. Yoongi ran his tongue around his mouth to gather a globule of saliva, which he spat down on the pavement. When he looked up again, he saw that the boys were nowhere in sight. They had disappeared around the corner, leaving him alone on the dark and flooded street. He took another slow and deep pull on his cigarette, and then he decided to step off the stoop and get moving.

Cold rain started pelting him the instant that he left the shelter of the store awning. Just a few steps away from the building was enough to make droplets start coursing down his cheeks and drip off the rounded tip of his nose. He had no umbrella on hand. He had left his home without a hat, and his flight jacket had no hood to keep him dry from the downpour.

“Fuckin’ great,” Yoongi muttered around his cigarette, as he rapidly blinked a pesky bead of rainwater out of his eye.

At least he was only a couple of streets away from sweet, sweet shelter. Sweet and warm shelter, considering Jimin was waiting on his return.

Jimin had been hiding in his home for three days now. Three long, strange days that didn't quite feel real. Several times, Yoongi had found himself pinching the back of his hand just to make sure that he was awake and wasn't stuck in some lucid daydream brought about from sleep deprivation. But no matter his doubts and disbelief, the reality was that Jimin was seeking shelter in his home.

It was not a dream.

Yoongi didn't dream. He had nightmares and strange moments in which he relived his memories. Often the bad ones, rarely the good ones. He didn't dream. His slumbering mind couldn't have imagined something as wonderful as Jimin returning to him, it had never been kind to him.

In one hand, Yoongi was carrying several plastic bags filled with booze and food from the store.

There was already a decent amount of booze in his kitchen, as he was partial to a strong glass of Scotch whisky or red wine every now and again. If he were lucky, a couple of glasses would help him lose consciousness on the nights when he couldn't sleep. He had developed his tastes over the years; he no longer touched any other kind of alcohol.

Especially not soju.

Just thinking about the taste made him want to gag. It brought back terrible memories of getting wasted in their dorm until his liver had hurt so much that he had been convinced he wouldn't wake up the next day. Until his squad mates had had enough of his antics and thrown him into the shower to try and sober him up under the freezing-cold stream of water. They had hated it when he had gotten drunk because it had affected his ability to perform out in the field the following day. It was a miracle that he hadn't ended up killing himself or one of them during a mission back then.

Yoongi could remember lying on the bathroom floor one night, bleeding from a laceration on his temple that had come from a hard smack against the rim of the toilet, his entire body trembling and twitching. Jungkook had been kneeling beside him. They had tried their hardest to get him to speak actual words and not just garbled nonsense. Their voice had been thick with sobs because they had been terrified that he had seriously fucked himself up this time.

Unfortunately, he had not.

Really, it was for the best that he avoided soju.

However, there was only alcohol that he liked stocked in his home. Jimin had different tastes, he always had. Much to his dismay, his long-time partner had been more than happy to knock back cheap soju, mixed with soft drinks and beer. He didn't have refined taste, he preferred to drink to get drunk.

Not that getting drunk helped in the slightest. It didn't help with forgetting. It didn't help with the pain; it often made it worse.

But in the few years they had been apart, Jimin's tastes had improved somewhat. He hadn't requested any soju, but he still had a soft spot for some dark beer. Instead, he had requested some bourbon whisky. Bourbon whisky wasn't Yoongi's favourite, it was sweeter on his palate than what he liked. But sweet whisky was still a vast improvement to cheap soju.

Resting up on his shoulder, there was a canvas bag filled with fresh clothing. Yoongi had retrieved them from the place that Jimin had been calling home for the last month. It changed constantly, especially in the wake of a new murder. He couldn't afford to stay in the same place for too long. He didn't belong there in the first place, so this meant he was unable to fully blend in and disappear. The longer he stayed, the more likely someone was to recognise him from beneath his disguises.

It wasn't difficult to recognise him when he was 'the face' of superheroes. Hell, he was considered the most important cultural export for the country because he was so in demand all over the world.

All it would take was a hint of his unmistakable, bright orange stubble to catch someone's eye. If they managed to get a good look at his face, he was done for. The whole world would know that he had been spotted for the first time since his disappearance. Within minutes, his name would be trending worldwide on social media platforms. Fans would pinpoint his exact location and show up in swarms, armed with professional cameras so they could snap photographs of their beloved hero, Mascot.

Truly, it was a miracle that Jimin had managed to stay invisible for so long. Yoongi had no idea how he had managed to do it. He wasn't even the most popular member of their squad (many thought he was cute and his cold personality was chic and masculine, but they found him too strange to consider him their favourite) but he still got recognised on the streets all the time. Someone as popular as Jimin, Taehyung or Jungkook ... he couldn't imagine how taxing it must be for them to be out in public.

Jimin had been hiding in *banjiha* for the best part of six-years. He rented them out for three-month long leases and terminated the contract the moment they were finished so he could move onto the next spot.

It was wrong to call the most recent place a home, it was a hideout. A home was somewhere comforting and warm, where one could rest their weary head after a long and hard day. A hideout was somewhere that was cold and empty, where one could disappear ... maybe even dump a body or two before swiftly leaving.

The basement room had been much smaller than the basement in his own home. Exposed and rusted copper pipes had run all over the walls. The kitchen had been tiny, with white goods that looked to have been decades old. Yoongi had peered inside the bathroom and closed the door the instant he had spotted the black mould that had been growing in the grout and all over the stained ceiling. The bedroom had been nothing more than a mattress on the floor, covered in blankets and pillows with a fan placed at the bottom.

Jimin fluctuated between temperatures. He often needed a fan to cool his body down or had sudden cold moments when he couldn't sleep without many blankets to trap his immense heat. Even if his hideout was filled with mould and cockroaches, he sure as shit wasn't going to not have his blankets and trusty fan.

As he had collected armfuls of fresh clothing and shoved them into the bag, Yoongi had thought about all the sleepless nights. The nights he had spent staring up at his ceiling, wondering where Jimin was in that moment. Was he lying in bed just like him, unable to sleep because there was a space on the mattress beside him that felt alien and wrong? Was he lying with someone else, someone that knew how to take care of him and show him the love that he deserved? Was he in another country, somewhere hot and sunny where it was still the middle of the day?

Was he dead?

Back when Jimin had first disappeared into thin air, leaving not a single trace behind, it had taken Yoongi so much strength to not chase after him. He knew guys that worked in law enforcement and private security. He knew guys that could have tracked Jimin's cards in order to find his location, who could have gotten their hands on CCTV footage from the days following his disappearance to track down his movements. All that he had needed to do was call in a few favours and they would have done it for him – no questions asked.

But Jimin had left him for a reason. Even if he didn't want to accept that reason. He had needed to go underground for a little while, just to clear his head and get himself back under control. Chasing after him – *stalking* him – would have been wrong. It would have gone against his personal wishes. The last thing that he had wanted to do was hurt him more, more than he already had.

So, with a heavy heart, Yoongi had forced himself to not do a thing. He had let Jimin disappear

into the shadows, where he had stayed for six-years. In that time, he hadn't spoken to their squad mates. They had no clue what had happened to him, beyond the limited information that he had been willing to share.

"Jimin needed a break. He's gone away for a while. He'll be back soon though, so don't worry. Everythin's gonna be fine."

For six-whole-years, Yoongi had waited ... and waited ... and waited.

And here Jimin was, returned to him once more.

It was strange. He had been gone for so long, and yet these last few days had made it feel like hardly any time at all. Yoongi had tried reflecting on those six-years, but he found that he couldn't recall much. They felt like a long month, one that had been a little boring. It was almost as if the world had stopped turning on its axis this whole time and had only just started spinning again.

Finally, he was awake.

The nightmare had ended and he could continue living again.

Several minutes of brisk walking later, Yoongi reached his home. As he made his way up the front path, he rummaged around in his jeans pocket to collect his house keys. He jogged up the porch steps because he wanted to be in and out of the rain at long last. If possible, he didn't want to leave the house for a couple of days, just to avoid the goddamn rain. With some fumbling, he managed to get the key into the lock to unlock the door.

The cats were still uncertain about the new guest. Some of them were still hiding upstairs to stay away from him and his new, strange scent. But quite a few of them had taken to Jimin with ease, their curiosity much too strong to control. When they had discovered that he had warm hands, and an even warmer lap, they had decided they were fond of him. Fond enough to want to curl up on his thighs and on the sofa cushion all around him, until he was practically buried beneath a dozen furry bodies.

Yoongi ran his gaze over the assortment of cats as he closed the door behind himself. They thought they were hidden well out of sight within the shadows of their cat beds. Like their tails weren't sticking right out of them and giving their hiding spots away. He snorted at the sight of one particular cat – Tete – who had his entire butt and hind legs sticking out because he was much too

big for the bed.

In his absence, Jimin had fed the cats. Yoongi could tell that he had because the entire lounge area had been swept clean and was spotless. The food trays had been washed, the bowls had been scrubbed clean and then filled up with fresh water. He had even freshened up the litter, and there was a pleasant smell of air freshener hanging in the air. Citrus and pine. He had shown him how to feed the cats yesterday morning because he had asked him. Jimin had observed from along the counter as he had filled bowl after bowl with a combination of dry and wet food and then set them in special places across the lounge. The lesson had come in handy, for he had taken care of them whilst he had been busy.

Yoongi's lips curled up at the corners in a soft smile as he watched Lili chowing down on some dry biscuits.

Lili and Lolo had taken to their new home with surprising ease. They had hidden behind furniture for the first day and refused to come out. But over time, with plenty of gentle coaxing and offers of treats, they had started socialising with the other cats. Now they were more than content to clamber all over the old kitchen counter whenever Yoongi was preparing their food, or playfully attack his socked feet when he was lying on the sofa. They were sweet girls, such beautiful cats with lovely dispositions, so he was pleased to have them in his home.

Likewise, Jimin had taken to his home with ease. The first day, when Yoongi had come around from his slumber in the afternoon, he had been greeted to the sight of the other man working out across the floor. He had been clad in nothing but a pair of tight briefs. Sweat had been flying off his body. He had been coated in so much sweat that there had been dark puddles on the concrete all around him.

Jimin spent most of his time working out. When he wasn't working out, he was bathing, eating, or sleeping. He had been quiet for the last few days, seemingly out of respect for his privacy and because he hadn't wanted to impose on him. But this morning, he had woken Yoongi up with a mug of black coffee and a smile, which he was taking to be a sign that he was starting to feel less like a stranger.

Yoongi was pleased to have him too.

As he reached up to run his fingers through his damp hair, he felt rainwater running down the back of his hand in rivulets. It dripped onto the sheepskin collar of his jacket and down onto the floor. After stepping out of his boots and into his house slippers, he removed his jacket and hung it on a hook on the wall.

Yoongi collected the grocery bags from the floor. Momi had been sniffing around them, curious about the scent of the rain and the hidden contents. He gave her a quick rub on the head, and then he straightened up with a soft grunt. His knees popped like usual and made him wince. He dragged his heavy feet across the floor and went down the basement steps at a lumbering pace. He was in the act of descending when he caught sight of movement, so he turned his head to track it.

Jimin was standing in the middle of the lounge, completely naked.

Yoongi came to a halting stop. He stopped so suddenly that he was amazed his feet didn't make the same screeching sound as braking tires against tarmac. He almost dropped the store bags because his fingers loosened in a spasm.

Jimin had just stepped out of the bath. He had always preferred baths to showers. He liked heating up the water over and over until it was almost bubbling like a hot spring, just so he could stay submerged for as long as he pleased. Yoongi could tell that he had bathed rather than showered because there was that same flush of colour beneath his skin.

The flush he had loved feeling against his skin when Jimin had slipped beneath the covers beside him.

His soft, warm skin when he had pressed himself up against his side and plucked whatever book he had been reading out of his hands with a lopsided grin.

Yoongi swallowed hard, his fingers tightening around the handles of the store bags. The plastic softly rustled in response.

Jimin was so busy towelling his head that he hadn't noticed him. The loud volume of the video that was playing on his phone had covered the soft *thump* of his footsteps on the basement steps. He was roughly drying his hair, the cotton rubbing against the prickly, orange stubble with a scratching sound. Most of his face was obscured by the towel, save for the lower half.

Even from his distance, Yoongi could see that he hadn't dried his body yet. Beaded moisture clung to his golden skin. It rolled down his full breast only to disappear within the dimples between his strong abdominal muscles. Droplets flew off his skin as he moved, splashing down onto the concrete floor beneath his slippered feet.

Even though he knew he shouldn't stare, Yoongi couldn't help himself. The sight of his built chest,

which narrowed down to his thin waist and then flared out once more around his hips and thick thighs. His defined biceps and bulging calves, the sharp cut of his toned stomach ...

How could he not stare at him?

Jimin shifted the towel to his shoulders. He was in the act of wiping his inner ear when he caught sight of him from across the room. His movements slowed down but he didn't fall still. He looked surprised to see him, but not angry or embarrassed that he had caught him in such a vulnerable state.

"I got you some stuff. I-I grabbed some fresh clothes and a few things you had left in the room and—" Yoongi felt his gaze shifting down towards that bush of hair between his open legs, which was almost the same shade of orange as the hair on his head. Only softer, less vivid. The thatch that led down to his thick cock. He dragged his eyes away with a strangled sound. It got trapped in his throat, threatened to choke him. "Sorry, I didn't mean to stare. That was rude—"

"You don't need to apologise," Jimin spoke over him. He was courteous enough to cover himself with the towel, just so Yoongi could stop rolling his eyes around the room. "You don't need to look away either. We've been lovers for, what, 10-years? I'm not uncomfortable with you looking at me."

"Yeah, but that was in the past," he pointed out with a hard gulp.

Jimin's voice was whisper-soft as he said, "I never said it was over."

"... Then what are we?" Yoongi sucked his lower lip in to gnaw on it, letting his words hang in the air. But he found he hated the silence, so he had to say something to break it. "Are we still a thing? Or is it too late to try and pick it all up again?"

Jimin thought this over and then softly shrugged his shoulders. The movement made his chest muscles shift in an enticing way. "I think it's complicated right now. But it doesn't have to be. I'm open to talking about it, whenever you want. Okay?"

After a moment of silent contemplation, Yoongi went down the last couple of steps. He handed Jimin the canvas bag, and then he moved to place the store bags down onto the kitchen counter. He took a deep breath and held it in his lungs as he leaned against the counter, his weight balanced on his wrists.

Jimin had just told him that it was not over, that *they* were not over. They were still a couple. Their relationship hadn't been buried in a shallow grave six-years ago. It was complicated, and it was going to take time to heal and come to terms with what had happened since they had parted ways ... but there was still hope that they could remedy the situation.

Yoongi felt a sudden rush of energy coursing through his body, pure elation mixed with powerful adrenaline. His entire body was shaking, and he could feel his lips quivering as he squeezed his eyes shut.

The sound of the bag zipper running was loud in the silence of the home. Jimin quickly rifled through the clothing. The mixture of tracksuits, vest tops, underwear and balled-up socks dryly rustled as he selected something to wear.

Yoongi spared a quick glance back over his shoulder. He ran his gaze down Jimin's back, taking in the sight of his toned muscles. They were visible under his tanned skin, cut to perfection so they strained and bulged in all the right places. The valley of his spine was deep, and his trapezius, rhomboids, and delts rippled beneath his skin as he reached up to drag a black vest top on over his head. Then he slipped into a pair of matching briefs. After some thought, he added a pair of light-grey sweatpants on top.

As he shifted to sit down on the sofa, Jimin collected his phone from the coffee table. He settled back into place, resting his feet on the scratched-up surface so he could comfortably slouch against the cushions. "I was listening to the news. Yoo's death has been in the headlines for days now," he explained, as he stopped the video. He hit the screen a few times with his thumb and then another video started playing.

Yoongi heard the introduction sound for a popular news broadcasting channel coming from the speakers. He shifted to lean back against the counter, cocking his head so he could listen to what was being said on the clip.

"Busan Metropolitan Police Agency has released a statement this morning following reports that there is a serial killer active in the city. According to statements made to KBS from an anonymous source within the Nam-gu department, the shocking murder of Yoo Hyungmin marks the fourth victim in a killing spree that has shocked the nation. Yoo was a civil servant, with decades of experience in educating gifted children on behalf of The Academy. His most notable students include Captain, real name Kim Namjoon, who is now the lead inspector of the homicide case, and Mascot, real name Park Jimin, who is still missing-in-action."

Yoongi lifted his gaze from the floor to look over at the other man. Jimin looked away from the

phone screen to hold his gaze. His expression was hard to read because he had always been so great at keeping his emotions guarded. There was no telling if he was concerned about his name being used in news reports about the serial killer, or if he was amused because no one had managed to link him to the crimes yet.

An anonymous source within the Nam-gu police department? Goddamn, there was a sell-out in Namjoon's department that was leaking information to the press. Yoongi left out a hard *tsk* from the corner of his mouth and shook his head in disgust.

In all the years that Namjoon had commanded them, none of them would have dared do something so disrespectful. Yet his civilian colleagues were more than eager to leak private information to the press to line their wallets with some extra cash. They had no respect for him, it was evident in their actions.

Fuck the police, they didn't deserve a man like Namjoon. He was too honest for them, and his hands were much too clean.

Jimin paused the video and tossed his phone onto the cushion beside him. He folded his arms over his chest and let his breath out in a soft sigh. "I don't like how he's still making headlines. It wasn't like this with the others."

"He ain't makin' the headlines because he was important, it was because you killed him," Yoongi pointed out in a matter-of-fact tone. "No one gives a shit about Yoo. They only care about him because he's your victim. If he'd dropped dead of a heart attack, there wouldn't even be an obituary in the papers for him."

Jimin hummed as he stared down at his phone. His brow was furrowed enough to make gentle creases appear on his forehead, and his lips were pulled down at the corners. After some thought, he remarked, "Officially becoming a serial killer is going to affect my technique. It's going to make it more difficult to go after my next target. But it's not going to stop me. I'll just have to be more careful."

"Well, you ain't gonna be operatin' on your own."

"... Have you decided to help me?"

"I, uh ... I dunno," Yoongi admitted, reaching up to scratch at the back of his neck. "I dunno if I

can do the deed, if I can ... kill him. But I can help you with your mission. We can create an attack plan together. I can do any stalkin' you need. I can do some diggin' through files and shit, I've got some buddies in private security that owe me favours. You ain't gonna be plottin' this one on your own."

"Thank you," Jimin said in a soft voice. Though his expression had yet to shift, his tone revealed that he was touched by his offer of assistance. "I know this isn't easy for you. I know that you want nothing to do with death. So, I'm grateful that you would be willing to assist me."

"Eh, don't mention it."

Yoongi turned his back on him so he could put away the groceries. He moved around the kitchen, shoving the different goods into the refrigerator and pantry. The aroma of fresh coffee wafted from the machine along the counter because Jimin had brewed some right before he had arrived back home. When he had finished emptying the store bags, he poured out two mugs and carried them over to the sofa.

"I should be thankin' you for feedin' the cats for me. It takes so long, and they make so much noise and trip me up." Yoongi dropped to sit on the opposite end of the sofa. He retrieved his mug from the table and folded his legs up on the cushion to get comfortable. "I love them, but they're a real handful."

"Oh, I've been meaning to ask. How do you feed all of these cats?" Jimin shifted to pick up Dabi from the floor. The black cat went limp in his hold and allowed him to place him right in his lap. It seemed he liked his warm hands, for he started purring right away. "Surely you must be burning a hole in your bank account?"

"Not really. I did this campaign for the government, for animal welfare," Yoongi rapidly explained, nursing the fragrant and hot mug beneath his lips. "A bunch of organisations send me things every week, as a way of thanks. These big boxes filled with everythin' I could possibly need. The cats are never left wantin', and I never need to race to the convenience store in the middle of the night to purchase a dozen tins of cat food."

Jimin let out a soft giggle and then exclaimed, "Oh, wait! I remember that!"

When their squad had disbanded, they had all gone their separate ways. For some of them, the new career path had been easy. A logical choice. The rest were still trying to find their place in the world.

Namjoon had joined the National Police Agency. His gift had been greatly sought by them for many years. He had simply belonged there. Had he not joined law enforcement, he would have excelled as a human rights lawyer. Maybe a politician. But a good one, not a corrupt bastard.

Not like Moon Jaeho, the fucking prick. It was only a matter of time before that man's name appeared on Jimin's hit list. Yoongi hoped it would come sooner, rather than later.

Namjoon's department was situated over in Nam-gu, which was where Yoongi happened to reside these days. He had requested that he start his service as a police officer because he hadn't wanted preferential treatment regarding his gift and celebrity status. However, he had aced the examinations and been promoted to the role of inspector after just a year of service.

The *banjiha* that Jimin had been staying in had been just a few blocks away from the station. Practically a stone's throw away, yet Namjoon had no idea.

Talk about flying under the radar.

Or slipping a hand inside the tiger's cage.

Seokjin had taken to his new acting profession like a bird took to the skies. He had bagged his first drama role just three months after their squad had disbanded, and it had all been smooth sailing from that point.

The dramas (and several standalone films, which had all been box office successes) were loosely based on real events that had happened during their years as heroes. Only for some reason, Seokjin had been transported to an alternate reality where they had all died. Instead, he had to solve crimes and punish evildoers with his two unlikely sidekicks: a young and savvy female police inspector, and a comedy relief high school boy that had some annoying catchphrase that never failed to get under Yoongi's skin. His character shared his hero title, Tempus, and his gift: temporal-spatial manipulation. At least that part was accurate.

Every single project that Seokjin had been involved in had been incredibly successful. So much so that the dramas had been released all over the world on a popular streaming website. The films had been granted limited international releases and had racked in billions of won in revenue from his army of fans. His most recent network drama was about how he had travelled back in time to the Joseon Dynasty, where he fought to protect the land from Japanese invasion.

Seokjin had never travelled back in time.

The crazy bastard ...

Taehyung was a world-renowned, multi-disciplined artist that had featured in many galleries, despite being a new and entirely untrained artist. But considering his gift, which granted him enhanced senses, he had an eye for the aesthetics. His keen eyes could see straight through walls, and their ability to see colours and minute details beyond the scope of the ungifted human eye meant that he could create masterpieces comparable to the old greats. His sharp ears helped him create classical pieces that were soaring and yet so intricate.

During their hero days, Taehyung had used his enhanced senses to scout locations, locate hostages, and track hidden threats. He had used his enhanced muscles to take down said threats with a swift punch to the solar plexus. Now he was painting massive canvases and penning opera scores.

Life was strange sometimes.

Hoseok, his partner, had set up an organisation for the welfare of children. He was the sole treasurer. The organisation's aims were to uplift the lives of children that had suffered abuse, loss of family, or terrible sickness. Some days, he helped man the helpline; he was that passionate about saving children in need.

It seemed that Hoseok's gift in creating barriers to save them from danger wasn't simply a talent that he had used when on duty. Even when he was unable to physically cast his barriers over those in need, he was constantly finding ways to protect them from harm.

Jungkook was an enigma. So far as Yoongi knew, they were yet to find work. They seemed to be having trouble finding their feet now that they were no longer a hero. It was no wonder why. It wasn't exactly easy to find a profession in which their talents would be useful. He was sure they must be doing something. Last time he had checked, Jungkook had been doing some kind of mentoring. Teaching kids how to harness their gifts. They would be a good mentor, far better than him.

Yoongi was officially retired. Well, not exactly. He didn't really know what was going on with the ongoing police investigation. Technically, he might be considered under their employment (and if he was, he was definitely expecting a pay packet.) He knew that being unemployed at the age of 36 wasn't a good thing. Most people couldn't survive without finding another job to pay for their

living necessities. But after a lifetime spent shouldering the abuse and physical labour that came with being a hero, he didn't have the strength left in him to follow another path.

He was more than content to spend the rest of his days living off the handsome government benefits that he was eligible for. Let those useless idiots keep lining his pockets with cash. He made a tidy amount from royalties every couple of months because his likeness was being used for everything from comic books, video games and action figures, to sponsorships for various consumerist goods.

There was always something so strange about going into a convenience store and seeing his face plastered onto a bottle of soju.

Or milk.

They had needed to appeal to the young and old fans. It wasn't responsible to advertise alcoholic beverages when they had a cult following of elementary and middle school children. But when the big corporations had dangled 10-figure sums in front of their promotional teams' faces ...

Well, money talked and the greedy listened.

Like he had told Jimin, he had done various advertisements and campaigns on behalf of the government too. Mostly for animal welfare, he didn't care all that much about human welfare these days. Other than that, the most work he had done in months was assisting Namjoon with the ongoing gifted serial kill spree.

Jimin was unemployed too.

Well, murder was certainly a profession.

Never mind, Jimin was doing his job very well.

"You, uh, you do?" Yoongi asked. He lowered his mug from his lips, his eyes growing rounded in wonder.

“Yes, I remember,” Jimin reaffirmed with a nod. Then he leaned forward to collect his own mug. Dabi didn’t move on his lap; he stayed in place, purring away like an engine. “There were advertisements of you all over the place. They were funny. I’m sorry, they were so funny and—”

“Nah, you ain’t gotta apologise,” he interjected with a soft head shake. He snorted hard as he shifted on the seat. “They were fuckin’ awful. Cringe comedy at its finest. What was the line again? Uh ... Oh! ‘Buddy died on the side of the road. His dyin’ thought? How much he missed his kind, sweet human.’ Shit, they were so bad. I dunno how I recorded those lines without laughin’ or groanin’.”

“Was that Buddy’s last thought? Have you found a way to make contact with animals yet? Beyond just gathering visual information from their remains, I mean?”

“Pft, no, I still can’t talk to them. But what harm was a little white lie, huh?” Yoongi gave a soft shrug as he brought his mug up to his lips to take his first quick sip of scalding-hot coffee. “People believed me. That first year, the rate of abandoned cats and dogs went down by 15%. I call that a success.”

“We love a success story,” Jimin said with a smile. He jokingly toasted their mugs and then slouched back against the cushions. He stared down into the dark contents of the mug with a soft smile, but there was something on his face that caught his attention.

“Are you a’ight, Jimin?”

“Hmm? Oh, yes. Just restless,” he replied, before quickly adding. “I hate the days after I kill one of them. I need to stay inside, I can’t go out, even in the dead of night. It’s too risky for me to go out after a death. I’m scared that my cover will be blown, and The Agency will be alerted. But I just want to get out and breathe some fresh air, feel the rain on my skin. You know?”

“Nah, you don’t want that. It’s pissin’ down right now,” Yoongi joked from over the top of his mug. This quip made the other man softly laugh as he slowly ran his thumb over the rim of his mug. “I’m surprised you have the energy to be restless. You worked out for eight hours yesterday.”

“Only eight? That’s less than usual.”

“... Are you bein’ serious?”

“Yes. There’s little else for me to do. If I’m not working out, I’m stalking them, tracking their movements, making connections, refining my plan.” Jimin took his own sip of coffee and then added, “It’s been that way for two-years, Yoongi. It’s hard to switch it off, but I’m trying to be less intense about it. I don’t want to keep you awake at night.”

“I don’t sleep.”

“You’re a liar. Did you know that?”

Yoongi snorted laughter at this little joke. He stuck his tongue out to wet his lips, tasting the lingering remains of his cigarette mingling with the strong and acidic flavour of the coffee. “I’m not lyin’, I don’t sleep too good these days. Since you came back, I, uh, I’ve been sleepin’ better.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Jimin remarked, his lips softly turning up at the corners. “You need the rest. You’re skinnier than ever these days, and you look so tired.”

“I *am* tired,” he pointed out, which earned him another laugh. “I’m fuckin’ exhausted, Jimin.”

“It’s been hard on you?”

“... Yeah, it’s been hard.”

This was a massive understatement, but the other man didn’t need to know this fact. Yoongi didn’t need to tell him that the past few years had been hard because he could see it just looking at his face. The deepening lines at the corners of his eyes, which hadn’t been so noticeable when they had last seen one another. The glazed look in his eyes that he got sometimes when he wasn’t fully grounded, his mind wandering on him like a dog that hadn’t been chained up. The gauntness of his cheeks and the sharp line of his jaw, which made his usually soft and rounded face look more angular ... look more starved.

There was a hollowness to him now. Like he was a shade of his former self.

Times had been more than hard on him; they had almost destroyed him.

But now that Jimin had come back, now that he had finally been given the purpose he had been unable to find for these last six-years years, he was going to come back swinging.

Yoongi shifted to place his mug down on the coffee table. As he got to his feet, he said, “I’m gonna start makin’ dinner – curry.”

“Curry?” Jimin shifted on the sofa at this, eagerly perking up. “You’re making curry?”

“Uhuh, with rice,” he reaffirmed with a nod, as he retrieved the large pot from the shelf above the sink. It was heavy, so he let out a deep grunt as he placed it down onto the stove.

“... Oh, I missed your curry, Yoongi.”

When he spared a quick glance back over his shoulder, he saw there was a wistful smile on Jimin’s face. His eyelids were crinkled at the corners, and his dark eyes were twinkling. His lips slowly curled up into a grin, which he hid from view behind his fingers.

The sight of his smile made Yoongi’s chest flood with warmth. His cheeks flushed with colour and started tingling. He looked away before his own lips curled up into a pleased smile.

God, he had missed that smile. That sweet, kind smile that had no darkness in it, that was free from misery and pain.

First, Yoongi washed, peeled, and chopped up some carrots, potatoes, onions, garlic, and mushrooms. Next, he sliced and chopped up some chicken thighs. He combined the ingredients in a bowl, seasoned them with black pepper, salt, and gochugaru. Then he fried the ingredients on a low heat. The oil started hissing from the heat of the flames, the meat and vegetables softening and turning golden.

The scent attracted Jimin. He couldn’t help but wander across the kitchen to stand close to him. He hovered behind him, just to the side so he could gaze down into the hissing pot. Yoongi handed him a spatula and told him to stir it. Whilst he did so, he washed the rice and left it soaking in some water. Several minutes passed, but the ingredients were still firm and far from cooked.

“This is taking too long,” Jimin remarked, his voice bordering on an impatient whine. “You need a little more heat–”

“No, you’re gonna burn it!”

Yoongi grabbed the pot handles and lifted it away from the burner just in time. A second later, the flames came to life with a shocking burst of power. They went from blue to bright orange with a sudden roar. The sound scared the life out of a couple of cats that had been lingering around their feet. They skittered up the basement steps, their paws pounding on the concrete as loud as drums. Jimin’s eyes grew rounded with surprise when he saw just how huge the flames were. He quickly turned off the burner to kill the heat before it set one of them on fire.

Just like always, Jimin had been too impatient to wait. So he had stuck his fingers in the flames to give them a nice, fat boost. He had ruined countless dinners this way. Yoongi had never been able to leave him in the kitchen unattended because he had always used to turn up the heat to speed up the process. Somehow, he still didn’t seem to understand that more heat didn’t mean something would cook faster.

“Sorry,” Jimin said, his lips twitching at the corners in a sheepish smile. He twisted the dial to turn the burner back on, this time at a reasonable medium-high heat.

“... It’s fine, don’t worry about it,” Yoongi muttered, as he placed the pot back onto the burner. The heat inside it had continued cooking the chicken and vegetables, which were almost ready. “Just leave the cookin’ to me. Yeah?”

“I know, I know, I was going to do so. But I didn’t want you doing it all on your own. I thought it was better to offer some assistance.” Jimin slowly twisted back-and-forth on the spot as he gazed down into the hissing pot. He was balanced on the tips of his toes, and he had his troublesome hands loosely clasped behind his back. “But I always burn it ...”

“Mmm, the only thing you’re good at cookin’ is meat.” Yoongi gave the ingredients a quick stir, seeing that the vegetable chunks were starting to turn translucent and soft around the edges. The chicken had lightened in colour, the glossy pink flesh turning to a pale, whitish-grey. He poured several cups of water into the hissing pot, fully submerging everything, and then he placed the lid on top. “Maybe we’ll have a barbecue soon—”

The sudden sensation of weight settled on his shoulders. It took him a moment to realise that Jimin had just placed his hands on them. He felt his muscles tensing up in response to his touch, his breath catching in his throat and his fingers twitching around the spatula.

“I really am sorry,” Jimin said, his voice whisper-soft and husky. “And I just wanted to thank you for doing this. For making dinner. You didn’t have to do this. You’ve already done more than enough.”

“... Ain’t nothin’, Jimin,” Yoongi remarked, his own voice dipping low. “It’s just dinner.”

“It’s a wonderful dinner that I don’t deserve.”

Rather than reply to this, Yoongi studied the gently bubbling pot. He couldn’t help but start fiddling with the spatula. He had to fight the urge to close his eyes so he could savour the sensation of his warm palms settling in place on the slopes that ran between his neck and shoulders. The perfect spot, the spot that was just right for pressing his thumbs into to give his tight muscles a tender knead.

Jimin slowly moved closer to him. Yoongi felt the tip of his nose bumping against the curve of his jaw, then his cheek. He hesitated for a few seconds before pressing a chaste kiss on the curve of his cheek. Then he moved away from the stove, leaving Yoongi staring down at the bubbling pot in a mixture of joy and melancholic longing.

As soon as the chicken and vegetables were soft, Yoongi tossed curry blocks into the bubbling water. He added more seasoning and a dash of Worcestershire sauce and honey for sweetness. He left it to thicken whilst he scooped mounds of steaming rice from the rice cooker. As he generously ladled curry over the bowls of rice, Jimin retrieved a couple of chilled beers from the fridge.

There was no dining table because Yoongi had no need for one. They had to use the coffee table, sitting on cross-legged on cushions on the floor. Hunkering down to sit on the floor was a pain in the arse. He let his breath out in a soft grunt as he settled onto the cushion and tried to get comfortable.

Across the small table, Jimin was busy sprinkling extra gochugaru over his serving of curry, just to make it spicier. The sight made Yoongi chuckle to himself as he collected his spoon and gathered together a mixture of curry and rice. He was amazed by just how spicy Jimin liked his food. It surpassed enjoyment for the sake of flavour and the lingering, pleasurable burn on the lips and tongue. He added enough spice to cause pain.

One time, Taehyung had sampled a bite of buldak that Jimin had seasoned. It had been so intense that his eyes had erupted with tears and sweat had broken out on his brow from just a single bite.

Yoongi had never allowed Jimin to season their dinners. He liked having working taste buds and not shitting blood.

They shared the meal in silence. Jimin praised his cooking and told him it was delicious, to which Yoongi softly hummed. But save for those brief words, there was nothing to say. There was no need to talk in order to fill the silence in the air because they were comfortable with it. It felt familiar, felt natural and peaceful, rather than awkward and tense.

Yoongi was more than content to simply watch the other man from across the table, taking silent pleasure in seeing the way that he eagerly shovelled loaded spoonfuls of food into his mouth. Jimin had always been a messy eater, so the thick sauce got smeared all around the corners of his mouth. He didn't complain when Yoongi reached over to wipe a particularly large blob free with the side of his thumb. He allowed him to wipe it free, his lips curling up in a soft smile at the sight of him quickly sucking the sauce off the pad of his thumb.

As soon as they had finished dinner, Jimin offered to clean the dishes because he was a guest. Whilst he did so, Yoongi took a quick shower to freshen up. He had been longing to wash his hair after it had gotten soaked through with rain. It felt so good standing beneath the hot stream for a while, not even moving but just savouring the sensation of the water pattering down onto his scalp, trickling down the back of his neck and aching back. At some point, Jimin entered the bathroom to use the toilet. Even though he was turned away from him, Yoongi could feel his gaze lingering on his naked back the entire time.

When he emerged from the bathroom sometime later, Yoongi saw that Jimin was sitting on the sofa. He had slipped out of his vest top and sweatpants but was still wearing his briefs. There was a cat on his lap – Dabi, of course. He had told him that he was his favourite, and it seemed that the mischievous fucker liked him just as much. He looked very comfortable slouched on the stack of cushions. He had retrieved his journal from his bag so he could study it. Judging from his furrowed brow and pouted lips, he was deeply focused on something important.

Yoongi paused in the doorway to watch him as he roughly towelled at his hair. Cooling droplets of water ran down the back of his neck to soak into the neckline of his sleep t-shirt. It was a faded logo t-shirt from an old merchandise deal that had illustrations of them on it. Their squad was caught in the heat of battle, like something straight out of a comic book panel.

As he turned the page, Jimin happened to glance up and notice him across the floor. He studied him for a moment, and then he shifted to place the journal down on the armrest. "Come here," he said in a soft voice. He lifted his hands to gesture at him, curling his fingers inwards invitingly. There was a smile at the corners of his lips, which extended up to his eyes.

Yoongi hesitated, not quite sure what to do. The urge to dart across the floor and dive down at his

feet was overwhelming, but he knew that he had to resist it.

It was too much, much too soon. There was no telling how long Jimin would be staying with him. He could disappear at any time, whenever he pleased. Just like he had that night. He might not even leave a note this time.

Yoongi couldn't open his heart up to him so easily. He couldn't lower his defences too much because it would only cause him pain when Jimin left again. It was smarter – and safer – to keep his distance.

But when Jimin's eyes disappeared into the creases of his eyelids as his lips parted to show his teeth ... how could he stay away?

Jimin was a raging fire, and Yoongi wanted to stick his fingers right into the flames.

Yoongi lowered himself down onto the cushion at his feet with a soft grunt. His lower back made its usual complaint, just to remind him that he wasn't getting any younger and had even more discomfort waiting for him in the future. He didn't even want to think about how his knees were going to feel in a couple of years. Or his injured shoulder, which had given him grief for many years now.

His shoulder hadn't been the same since it had suffered an injury during a mission. They had been busting open a human-trafficking ring that had been smuggling children across the world from the port. He had been careless, and some jopok punk had stabbed him right in the back of his shoulder. Taehyung had sent the fool flying through a wall moments later. He had nearly killed him, but in the moment, he hadn't cared. He had only cared about the sight of Yoongi on his knees, struggling to reach behind himself to pull the blade out of his own back.

When the wound had healed up, it had left behind some kind of damage. Muscle damage, nerve damage – he didn't know which one it was. He just knew that he had limited movement in his right shoulder as a result. Especially when it got cold and damp. This made his shoulder ache, like it was afflicted with some form of arthritis.

Jimin moved to place his feet down on the floor, bracketing him with his legs. Dabi didn't even move off his lap in response to the movement. He just slapped his tail around and shifted to find a better spot. Yoongi could feel the warmth of his smooth, inner thighs rubbing against his bare arms, and then the familiar sensation of his fingers slipping into his damp hair.

As he ran his fingers through his hair, Jimin generated a soft amount of heat. After several minutes of stroking, his hair would be completely dry from his touch. He had used to do this all the time because Yoongi adored the soft, warm contact. He had been lulled to sleep on many occasions savouring the sensation of his lover's fingers massaging circles into his scalp and temples.

"Mmm," he rumbled, deep in his chest. He rolled his head back in response to his touch and closed his eyes. "Shit, I missed this."

"Of course you did, this was your version of a lullaby."

"Nnn, no, my lullaby was listenin' to your heartbeat," he corrected. "So soft, so ... slow. *Ba-bump ... ba-bump ... ba-bump.*" This made the other man laugh as he sank his fingers deep into the mess of hair around his crown. "Mmm, oh, that's the spot, baby."

It was only after the affection slipped out that Yoongi realised what he had just said. He slowly opened his eyes to stare up at the stained ceiling as he mumbled, "Sorry, it just slipped out."

"You don't need to apologise," Jimin said without missing a beat. He didn't sound offended or upset in the slightest. He sounded amused, like he was smiling. "I missed doing this too."

"Mmm?" Yoongi hummed, languidly raising an eyebrow.

"Ah, ah, less of that," he scolded, as he moved one of his hands from his hair. His fingertips rubbed over his brow, smoothing at the lines that had appeared there. The combination of gentle pressure and warmth made him relax his brow once more. "No frowning, no scowling – just relax and let me take care of you."

"Mmm, I want you to do that but ..."

"But?"

"But I dunno if it's a good idea," Yoongi finished in a soft voice.

Jimin's fingers fell still at this, buried deep in the damp roots of his hair. He thought his words over

for a few seconds before letting out a soft sound. But rather than withdraw his fingers, he decided to carry on stroking them through his hair. “I want to do this. I’ve wanted to do this for such a long time now. If you want me to stop, just say so. I’ll stop, I promise.”

Yoongi held his tongue rather than mumble out a half-baked reply. He folded his arms across his chest as the other man resumed warming up his hair. His blunt nails picked at one of his elbows in his usual nervous habit. He tried his hardest to think, but it was difficult doing so when he just wanted to close his eyes and savour the pleasurable sensation of Jimin’s fingers massaging at his scalp and brow. When he started speaking, his words left his lips in a husky whisper. “You kissed me, before, in the kitchen.”

“I did.”

“Why? Why did you do that?”

“I wanted to thank you. I thought a kiss on the cheek would suffice.”

“D’you have any idea how much I’ve missed you, Jimin?”

“Yes, you’ve missed me as much as I’ve missed you.”

“So, you must understand why I’m scared right now ... yeah?”

“Why are you scared? Do you think I’m going to leave you again?”

“Are you?”

“No, I told you so that night. I’ve got no plans of leaving, not like I did back then.” Jimin’s fingers once more trailed down to his brow to massage at the creases that were starting to form there. Yoongi was forced to relax his brow once more, his breath leaving his lips in a soft sigh. “You’re scared of letting me get close to you because you’re scared that I’ll break your heart, aren’t you?”

“... Yeah, Jimin. Yeah, I’m terrified that’s gonna happen.” Yoongi stuck his tongue out to wet his lips. They felt dry against the tip of his tongue. “I can’t go through that again.”

“You won’t have to.” Jimin leaned forward to hover over him, so he dragged his gaze away from the ceiling to look up into his eyes. “I’m here now, and I’m here to stay, if you want me. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“I never said that we were over, Yoongi. I never said it because I didn’t want that. I didn’t want to leave you, but I had to do it. I had to get away for a while because I was dangerous back then. I nearly ... I strangled you, with my own hands. I nearly killed you that night. I needed to get away before I did something that would destroy you. So, I ran away. But I never said that I hated you. I never said that I wanted to end our relationship, and I still don’t want that. I want to be with you. I *love* you; I *need* you.”

“I love you too, Jimin,” Yoongi whispered, as he reached up to snag hold of his wrist. “You ain’t got a clue how much I need you.”

“I know it will take time for you to trust me again, after what I did—”

“No, no, I trust you.”

“—and I’m not mad at you for having your walls up around me. I want you to keep up those walls until you feel ready to let me back inside. I want to earn back your trust. Okay?”

“Okay,” he whispered with a soft nod. “Okay, I understand.”

“Now, is it alright if I touch you like this?”

“Yeah, god yeah. I want you to touch me.”

“Good, good boy.” Jimin moved his hand from his brow to cup his cheek, and then he leaned down to press a soft kiss on the corner of his lips.

Yoongi wanted to turn his face to bring their lips together in a proper kiss. But he knew that it was

too fast for that, so he forced himself to stay still and savour the gentle peck.

“Stop frowning at me! You’re going to get wrinkles!”

“I’ve already got them. What’s a few more, huh? I’ll look refined.”

“You’ll never look refined, Yoongi. You could wear a three-piece suit and still look like a bumpkin.”

Yoongi chuckled at this as he shifted on the cushion. He settled into the space between Jimin’s warm thighs and let his breath out in a sigh of comfort and relief, feeling his fingers massaging and scratching at his scalp.

Time seemed to stop moving. Sitting there, slouched against the sofa with his eyes closed and the other man’s warm fingers running through his hair and all over his face, Yoongi felt like he had transcended above such meaningless concepts like time and space. There was nothing else in that moment that existed beyond him and Jimin. The world started and ended at the place of contact between their two bodies. He couldn’t feel the rest of his body, not even his aching head or stiff knees. He pondered on the thought that this was what death would feel like – an eternal stretch of nothing but the faintest sensation of existence. The ghost of feeling, the lack of substance but not awareness.

Jimin took his sweet time massaging his scalp. He did so even long after his hair had dried, for he was enjoying the intimate contact just as much as he was. But unfortunately, he had to stop at some point. He did so before Yoongi ended up drifting off on the floor, saving him from waking up in the morning with a sore back.

Jimin retired to bed first, just like he had for the last few days. After spending a couple of hours poring over his journal and phone with a few bottles of beer and a glass or two of Bourbon, he decided to call it quits for the night. He disappeared into the bathroom to get cleaned up and empty his alcohol-filled bladder, and then he slipped under the covers without saying a single word.

Yoongi had spent his time on the other end of the sofa grooming whatever cat had decided to climb into his lap. He had tried focusing on his true crime book, but it had been difficult keeping his eyes on the page when he had longed to just sit there and stare at Jimin instead. Jimin always looked so attractive when he was focused on something that it was impossible not looking at him whenever he pulled out his journal. Whatever was inside that book, it was important, he knew that much. It was probably related to his hit list; he was likely studying his notes on his next victim.

It took some time, but the soft sound of snoring finally floated across the floor. When Yoongi glanced back over his shoulder, he saw that Jimin was lying with his back to him, buried beneath the covers and extra blankets to stay warm whilst he slumbered. Even though he knew he should stay away, he knew that he wasn't going to be able to resist the urge.

The morning that he had discovered Jimin in his home, Yoongi had fallen asleep with his face pressed into his lap. He had drifted off with cheeks wet with tears whilst the other man had stroked his warm fingers through his damp hair. Eventually, Jimin had fallen asleep too. He had been exhausted after what had happened with Yoo and had needed to rest to recover his strength and allow his injury time to heal.

Yoongi had since offered him his bed, but he had declined it. Jimin had wanted to sleep on the sofa instead because he hadn't wanted to impose on him. But with enough back-and-forth bickering, he had finally accepted the offer. They had been sleeping apart since that morning, even though there had been a lingering feeling in the air that neither one of them had wanted to stay apart.

Yoongi hadn't wanted to be the one to broach the subject. He hadn't wanted to put him on the spot and make him feel uncomfortable. Jimin might have felt like he owed him in some way for providing him shelter in his time of need. He didn't want him thinking that he owed him a single thing – that wasn't why he had been protecting him from the law for these past few months.

However, Jimin hadn't said a thing either. He had shown him that he was clearly comfortable with close physical contact, despite how long they had been apart. But this didn't mean that he was comfortable sharing a bed with him. Lying in bed together, so close, so intimate ... mistakes could be made in the heat of the moment. Mistakes that would only cause them both more pain.

Would it be a sin to lie beside him?

Yoongi pondered on this as he eyed him from across the room. He rapidly concluded that it wouldn't. Sins wished they could be as sweet and tempting. Before he could talk himself out of it, he shifted to get to his feet and crossed the floor to draw closer to the bed. His feet softly padded on the concrete, which was cold against his bare skin. He hovered beside the bed for a moment, gazing down at the slumbering man.

Jimin looked so peaceful in the moment. His features were slack, relaxed in a way that they never were when he was awake. His skin had smoothed out and so the fine lines around his eyes and on his brow had disappeared. His full lips were parted to flash a hint of his crooked front teeth. His exhales escaped from between them in a soft snore.

So sweet, Jimin looked so sweet when he slept. He was so beautiful when he was unaware of himself. Only when he was unaware did he lower his defences enough to let Yoongi slip through the chinks in his armour and sink down deep inside.

Though he looked peaceful, the reality was often vastly different. Jimin had been plagued with frequent nightmares his entire life, just like him. If Yoongi did manage to get some sleep, it had to be brief. If it was longer than a couple of hours, he always woke up covered in sweat and gasping for breath. They had all suffered from nightmares over the years, but none so badly as Jimin.

After everything that he had been through, everything that he had seen, Jimin's mind was a minefield. When he was awake, he had just enough control over it to keep the demons at bay. But when he was sleeping, his defences were down, and he was vulnerable.

So painfully vulnerable.

The incident that had finally forced him to seek treatment? Jimin had suffered a nightmare so frightening that he had woken up screaming. When Yoongi had tried to calm him down, he had snagged his fingers around his throat and tried to strangle him. In the moment, he hadn't recognised him; he had thought he was some monster that was going to hurt him.

Jimin had come around just in time, right before his hands had erupted in white-hot flames.

Had he not done so, Yoongi would have died screaming. Until the flames had burned straight through his flesh and robbed him of the ability to scream.

Despite what had happened, Yoongi hadn't wanted to spend time away from him. Not even a single night. He had been terrified, but he had known that Jimin had never meant to hurt him. The following night, he had laid down beside him to show him that he trusted him, that he loved him and knew he wouldn't harm him.

If only he had been able to conquer his fear of becoming a father so easily.

Maybe none of this would have happened?

As he settled down on the mattress and fixed the covers over himself, Yoongi tried his hardest to not disturb him. He didn't want to bump their feet or elbows together because the rough contact might wake him up. He studied Jimin's slumbering face for a moment, and then he turned his back on him.

There, he wasn't intruding on his personal space. They were sharing the same bed, but there was nothing intimate about it. Friends and siblings shared beds like this, lying back-to-back. He was certain that Jimin wouldn't wake up and get angry at him for climbing into bed with him in the middle of the night. He must understand the reason why he had done so.

Yoongi couldn't sleep without him.

No matter how many blankets he tossed over himself, he couldn't replicate the warmth that radiated from Jimin's body.

Even with one of his cats nestled in his arms, it didn't feel the same as holding Jimin close. Like letting him press his face against his chest and tangle their legs together beneath the covers. His cats couldn't hold onto him the way that Jimin could. So tight, but never enough to cause discomfort.

Without Jimin's slow and steady breathing rhythm close to his ear, he couldn't stop thinking. He needed to focus on the sound because it would lull him to sleep.

Yoongi closed his eyes, letting his breath out in a soft exhale. He tried to get more comfortable by slipping one arm beneath his pillow. The basement was silent, save for the muffled sound coming from the cats upstairs. He could hear the other man's breathing. It was audible, not quite a snore. Just listening to it whilst he savoured the warmth coming from his body, he knew that he would drift off soon enough.

Jimin shifted behind him, letting out a soft sound that was trapped between a sigh and a moan. His bare feet kicked across the wrinkled sheet, which rustled from the contact. Then he rolled onto his back. Yoongi felt his elbow pressing into the dip of his lower back, and the contact made him bite down on his lower lip.

So warm, he was so warm.

"Hmm?" Jimin hummed, husky and soft. He lifted his head up off the pillow, his lips smacking

together. After a few seconds, he rolled onto his side to settle right up against his back.

Yoongi felt his arm slipping over his waist, and then the familiar sensation of his cheek pressing against that little, soft space between his sharp shoulder blades. His eyelids fluttered shut and he let his breath out in a quivering sigh.

Oh, how he had missed this.

How he had missed feeling safe, and warm, and loved.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

This was bad.

Taehyung was standing on the front step.

To say that Yoongi was surprised was an understatement. He was paralysed. Every single nerve in his body had lost its ability to function. He could feel the most pressing urge to let his bladder go loose so he could piss himself.

When he had heard the series of hard knocks on the front door, Yoongi had awoken with a jerk. Down in the basement, the sound had been muffled by the thick, concrete walls. But he was a light sleeper, always disturbed by the sound of his cats waging war on each other during the night.

However, he had slept deeply for the first time in years last night. He had drifted off from the powerful warmth of Jimin's body pressed against his back, so content and secure in his strong hold. Had someone not knocked on the door, he might have slept for several more hours. Maybe, he would have woken up to the feeling of Jimin's fingertips tenderly tracing the frown lines on his brow.

Yoongi hadn't been expecting any visitors today because he never had visitors. The only people that knocked on his door were delivery people, who brought him mail and takeaway food. He had certainly not ordered food, and he had received no alert about a delivery.

Jimin had stirred beside him, swiftly coming around from the faded sound. His fight-or-flight responses were so perfectly honed that he had been up on his knees within seconds, ready to bolt it if necessary.

As he had gotten to his feet, Yoongi had silently gestured at him to go into the bathroom. It was a small room, right in the far corner with a lockable door. Should the mysterious visitor be a certain someone with a police-issued badge that wanted to have a little chat with him, the bathroom was the safest place for him to hide.

Jimin hadn't needed anything more than a gesture to understand him. After all the time they had spent out in the field, they had learned to communicate as a squad without the need for words. A single wave of his wrist, a moment of eye-contact, this was all that was needed to convey a message. He had snatched up his wrinkled clothing from the floor and darted into the bathroom. He hadn't even made a sound; he had been that quick and light on his feet.

Yoongi had hastily stepped into his briefs, awkwardly hopping to try and not fall right on his arse. As he had made his way up the stairs, he had dragged his wrinkled sleep t-shirt on over his head. He had almost tripped over his cats because they had been crowded around the stairs. They had meowed and clawed at his bare legs, some of them having wanted attention and food, the others having been curious about who was on the other side of the door.

It wasn't even 8am yet.

Who the fuck would knock on someone else's door at such an ungodly hour?

Kim-fucking-Taehyung, that's who.

Yoongi stared at the other man's face, taking in the welcoming smile on his lips. Then he lowered his gaze to take in the rest of his appearance.

Taehyung was dressed the same as usual. He had always dressed like this, like he had been born in the wrong era. His tastes had matured over the years, which was a blessing. He had learned that less was more and there was no need for every item of clothing to be covered in prints. Looking at

him had often hurt Yoongi's eyes because of the garish colour palette and zany '70s-esque prints he had loved donning. Taehyung was such a handsome man; he had only gotten more attractive over time. And yet he had used to dress in such ridiculous clothes that it had been easy to forget this fact.

This morning, Taehyung was wearing a tan shirt covered in paisley print. He had tucked the ends of the shirt into a pair of wide-legged black trousers. The hem skirted around his ankles, revealing a flash of his tanned skin. On his feet, there were a pair of tasselled loafers. He was wearing a coffee-coloured long coat with a turndown collar, just to keep him dry. There was a heavy mist of moisture hanging in the air, which was threatening to suddenly become drizzle. His square spectacles were sitting on the end of his nose, and his black hair fell around his face in a mess of perfectly styled curls.

For some reason, Taehyung was holding two items: a bouquet of flowers and a cardboard box.

The flowers were all light shades, a beautiful mixture of white and pale blue, pink and yellow. Yoongi didn't like vibrantly coloured flowers, he much preferred muted shades. It was a lovely bouquet. He noted that the cardboard box was decorated in a matching pale blue ribbon. He felt like he recognised the box, but he was too foggy from sleep to figure out why it looked familiar.

"What's that?" Yoongi managed to ask. His voice came out of his lips in a husky croak from a combination of morning dryness and fear.

"Flowers and cake," Taehyung explained, his smile widening at the corners.

Had he not known him so well, Yoongi might have assumed that it would be impossible for his smile to get any bigger. But he knew that Taehyung was capable of smiling until every goddamn perfect tooth was visible. On any other person, it would have been unsettling. But when Taehyung smiled like that, it could make even a pessimist like Yoongi feel a little better.

"Yeah, I mean why d'you have them?"

"It's a special day today. It's June 13th."

Oh ...

Today was the date they had met for the first time. Taehyung had been the last one to be brought into The Academy. The day that they had been introduced to him had marked the day they had officially become a squad.

They had used to celebrate the date every year back in The Academy. Back then, they had been granted a whole day without classes and training. One teacher, who had taught them basic school curriculum, had always baked them a delicious cake, decorated her classroom with streamers and balloons, and set up a projector so they could watch cool American action films. Miss Kim Sungah had been an angel, a blessing they had all needed. Her classes had been a safe place, where they had been able to take reprieve and even cry, had their training sessions been difficult that day.

She had been fired when she had filed an abuse complaint to the police on their behalf.

Sungah had witnessed Jimin being grabbed in a chokehold and slammed into the floor by Yoo Hyungmin. The reason? He had spat at his feet when he had scolded him for being disrespectful.

One day, Sungah had been there for them. The next, she had disappeared off the face of the earth. They still didn't know what had happened to her. She might have been dismissed after being forced to sign a non-disclosure form. She might have disappeared permanently to keep her from exposing the horrific truth about what was really going on in The Academy. Namjoon had promised to look her up on the police database. He had sworn that he would find a way of tracking her down, but he must have forgotten to do so. With a gifted serial killer on the loose, it was no wonder why he had neglected to fulfil his promise.

After they had left The Academy, they could have easily fallen out of practicing the habit. But it had stuck with them. Even now, when they were all in the 30s – some of them pushing close to 40 – the responsibility of celebrating the date they had all been brought together always landed on one of them. Jimin had stepped up to the plate every year. But since his disappearance, the responsibility had fallen on Taehyung's shoulders.

Yoongi couldn't believe that something so important had slipped out of his mind. But considering everything that had happened over the last week, he didn't feel guilty for forgetting about the date.

"I'm going to visit the others later. Namjoon's busy with work, but he scheduled an evening dinner for us. I'm going to see Jungkook next, and then Seokjin. I woke up Hoseok this morning, he wasn't pleased."

"Oh, yeah?" Yoongi asked with a forced smile. He was trying his hardest to look calm and collected, to not let the other man realise that he was freaking out right now. His lips felt rubbery at

the corners, and he just knew that his smile looked like a grimace. “How come?”

“He woke up at 5am to the sound of me singing jazz.”

“Jesus, I’m surprised you’re still alive.”

“He knew what he was getting into.” Taehyung let out a sweet chuckle as he stepped from foot-to-foot. His gaze shifted to look over his shoulder. It was a discreet action, but it was not lost on Yoongi. Even in his foggy state, he detected the sly glance.

Taehyung was scoping out his home, which he had never visited before. None of them had because they didn’t know where it was. Only Namjoon knew where he lived, and he was courteous enough to not visit him. He knew that Yoongi was intensely private and didn’t like others getting into his space, not even his treasured friends. Apparently, Taehyung had decided to ignore this fact. Or he just didn’t give a damn.

“Can I come inside?”

Yoongi thought this over, and then he stepped back to grant the other man entry. He didn’t like this one bit, but he could hardly say no. Saying no meant that he had something to hide. He was just going to have to be careful and try to get Taehyung in and out of his home as swiftly as possible.

Just play it cool, man. Don’t give him a reason to suspect anythin’ and he won’t.

Taehyung had taken just a single step inside when he cried out, “Oh, bloody hell!” He almost dropped the flowers and cake box because he had been unable to resist the urge to cover his lower face with his hands. Yoongi dived forward to try and catch them, but he was able to recover before they slipped from his grasp. He had no choice but to press his nose against his upper arm, just to lessen the intense aroma of cat piss. His voice was muffled as he moaned, “*It smells bad in here!*”

“Oh? Uh, it ain’t that bad, I promise,” Yoongi muttered, reaching up to scratch at the back of his ear. He felt his cheeks warming up with an embarrassed blush. “Your nose, Tae. You need to turn off your nose.”

“*Wait, give me a moment.*” Taehyung stepped back outside so he could take a deep breath of fresh air and prepare himself. He closed his eyes as he tried to get himself under control.

Having enhanced senses, Taehyung had needed to learn how to control them, how to switch them off and on at will. Living in a world where walls had no meaning and flesh was as transparent as paper; where there was no silence or white noise, even in the dead of night; where he could smell and taste disease and death – it was insanity.

As a child, Taehyung hadn't known that humans weren't supposed to feel and perceive things the way he did. He had spent his early childhood years assuming that everyone saw the world just like him. That everyone's brains had been scrambled from noise and that everything had tasted icky because there had always been a bad smell in the air. It had taken a couple of years for his gift to be discovered. He had been diagnosed with sensory problems, had been labelled as autistic because of his uncommon and unique behaviour. In reality, he had been misdiagnosed because the doctors and psychologists hadn't known about gifts back then.

The reason he had been discovered? He had predicted the deaths of multiple people before the age of five.

Taehyung had been so accurate in his predictions that some people had called him cursed. He had been pelted with rocks by children and adults alike, who had been terrified that he would have gazed upon their faces and told them there was something strange growing in their heads or chests. Other people had called him a shaman because they had believed he was gifted with preternatural spiritual abilities.

But he hadn't been blessed by the spirits; he had simply seen illness inside their bodies with his eyes, had smelled the cancer with his nose. He had gazed upon his nursery teacher's brain and seen a strange growth slowly emerging from it, like a mushroom sprouting from a dark and dank hole. Several months later, she had died. Grade 4 glioblastoma tumour – fast spreading, had sunk its tendrils in deep and destroyed her brain.

When he had been discovered, Taehyung had finally learned that he wasn't like other children. His brain and body were abnormal, he had been born with enhanced senses and muscles. It was a rare gift – a mutated gift. Many were born with enhanced muscles, or an enhanced combination of senses. Few were born with both, especially all their senses. To this day, they still didn't know why he had been born with a mutated gift. His parents weren't gifted, yet they had created a child with an incredibly potent mutation.

Taehyung believed he might have had gifted ancestors and that the gift had skipped some generations, only to converge inside him.

Jimin had claimed that it was because Taehyung was one of a kind.

Taehyung had been born with the kind of gift that children had grown up wishing they had because it would make them superheroes.

Those children didn't know what happened to superheroes behind closed doors.

They only saw the heroic fights and the flashing lights of press cameras.

They never saw the cramped interrogation rooms filled with recording equipment and one-way windows.

They didn't see their friends disappearing one by one with a doctor, only to return a few days later with wide eyes and unexplained pain between their legs ... and rippling scars around their lower bellies.

Had Taehyung been unable to control his senses, he would have been driven mad a long time ago. There was only so much the human brain could take in at once, even gifted brains. His brain had reached its limit back in childhood. He had spent his days wearing ear plugs to lessen the constant noise inside his skull. He had avoided looking at other people's faces because he hadn't wanted to see their tongues moving around inside their skulls. Hadn't wanted to gaze upon their brains and see just how damaged from age they were.

It had taken him a long time and many years of constant training, but by the time they had graduated from The Academy, he had been able to control his gift. He had gained so much control over his senses that he could switch them off with ease, like there was a button in his brain. The only thing he couldn't control was his strength. But he had learned how to be gentle and restrain the power in his muscles. Sometimes, he slipped up and accidentally smashed a cup when he placed it down on a table. Just little accidents, nothing extreme. He had never injured a civilian by manhandling them, not once.

The process took just seconds. One moment, Taehyung was grimacing from the disgusting scent of his cats. The next, he was sighing in relief. He lowered his arm from his face and sniffed a few times to clear his sinuses.

"Better?"

"Okay, that's much better," Taehyung said with a nod. "I forgot to switch it off. I was enjoying the

scent of the flowers and cake that much. Oh, Yoongi! If you think bakeries smell good, I wish you could smell them the way I do!”

“Yeah, I wish I could too,” Yoongi said with a nervous chuckle.

Oh, they had really dodged a bullet.

They were so lucky that Taehyung never travelled around with active enhanced vision and hearing. It was too dangerous for him to do so. The visual information could cause a sensory overload. He could walk out in front of a car because he was so overwhelmed seeing and hearing *everything* that he hadn’t even noticed it.

Had his enhanced vision been active right now, Taehyung would have seen straight through several feet of earth and concrete walls and spotted Jimin down in the basement.

As he stepped inside his home, Yoongi asked, “Who told you where I live?”

“Namjoon.”

“Ah, that bastard ...”

“Hey, don’t blame him. I bugged him for weeks until he gave up and told me.”

Yoongi shut the door, hearing the lock clicking in the silence of his home. Could Jimin hear them downstairs? Could he hear Taehyung’s voice? Did he know what was happening right now? He had no way of telling, but he knew that Jimin wouldn’t leave the bathroom until he told him it was safe to do so.

“Did I wake you?” Taehyung spared a quick glance back over his shoulder as he crossed the lounge. He was looking at his clothes, at his wrinkled t-shirt and briefs that had clearly been snatched from the floor.

“I don’t sleep.”

“Ah, I forgot! The prince of darkness doesn’t ever sleep!” Taehyung cracked another grin as he placed the cake box down on the old kitchen counter. Cat fur dusted the surface, like it dusted every inch of the home.

Jimin had taken it upon himself to clean up the dander because it irritated his sinuses, made his eyes water and his nose run. But even after an extensive clean *and* many cat baths, brushings and trims, it was impossible getting rid of it all. Taehyung would be picking fur out of his clothes for weeks after this visit.

“Yeah, my trauma’s hilarious,” Yoongi drawled.

This dry quip made his friend chuckle. The sound made his lips quirk up at the corners, but the smile quickly disappeared because he was so apprehensive. Yoongi crossed the floor to draw closer to him as he slipped off his coat. He held his hand out in offering so he could hang it on the hook beside the door. If he didn’t, the cats would sleep on it.

Speaking of his cats, they seemed to be less scared of Taehyung. They had been scared of Jimin – though he had broken into the home and frightened them. They seemed more curious about this new stranger than frightened. A couple of them had crowded around his legs to sniff at his shoes and the ends of his trousers. They were filled with fascination because he had so many interesting scents coming from his body.

“It’s your favourite – lemon and coconut meringue cheesecake,” Taehyung explained, as he lifted the lid to reveal the cake inside.

The scent wafted up from the box to hit Yoongi in the face all the way across the room. So sweet, so creamy and warm. He couldn’t resist the scent, he just had to look at the cake. The soft yellow cream cheese was covered in a layer of white meringue, which had been dusted with lemon peel and browned. It looked so delicious that he felt his mouth flooding with saliva.

“From Sweet Treat Boulangerie?”

“I ordered it special, just for you.”

Yoongi was so touched that he didn’t know what to say. He could only stare down at the cake as he tried to find the right words. Even though it wasn’t much, he came to the conclusion that a simple

thanks would convey his gratitude more than flowery words. The sentiment meant more than the words, after all. “Thank you, Taehyung. It’s a wonderful gift.”

Taehyung’s voice was whisper-soft as he said, “I wish that he was here too. With you, with us. I just wish he was *somewhere*. It doesn’t feel right spending another year without him.”

Taehyung had stopped saying Jimin’s name some time ago. At first, Yoongi had assumed that he was hurt and was doing so out of anger. Like a child that didn’t want to say the name of a friend that had upset them because they believed it would show they still cared about them.

But over time he had come to realise the truth. Taehyung had stopped saying Jimin’s name because it *hurt* him to say it. It wasn’t anger; it was sadness. Saying his name felt wrong, so he had decided to not utter it.

“I’ll just have to crack open a beer in his honour,” he finished with a soft smile. It didn’t quite extend to the corners of his eyes, but at least it didn’t look like a grimace. “I’m sure he would appreciate it. Speaking of drinking, do you have any coffee?”

“Uh, yeah. Wait here, the kitchen’s downstairs.”

“I can come with you. I’ll put these in some water and cut the cake whilst you make the coffee—”

“I don’t like people goin’ down there,” Yoongi interjected, his voice low and serious.

For a moment, Taehyung was so distracted fluffing at the bouquet of flowers that he didn’t seem to properly register his words. As it dawned on him that he had just forbade him from going down into the basement, he glanced up from the flowers to hold his gaze. His expression was hard to read, but he looked more curious than concerned.

“Are you hiding a dead body down there?” Taehyung joked, his gaze dropping to stare at the staircase beside them.

Yoongi felt every single muscle in his body hardening in response to that furtive glance. If he activated his enhanced vision, even just for a single second, he was going to detect Jimin. He had to clench his jaw tight just to stop a moan of horror from escaping his lips. He felt his back teeth grinding together so hard that it was a miracle they didn’t crack from the pressure.

But after a few seconds, Taehyung lifted his gaze to look at him. His lips curled up at the corners in a smile as he said, “It’s okay. You like your privacy, Yoongi. You always have. I won’t impose on you, that would be incredibly rude of me. I can stay up here with your delightful zoo.”

Yoongi tried to not sigh in relief as he made his way down into the basement. His heart was pounding a mile a minute in his chest and he felt dizzy. But it seemed that Taehyung hadn’t noticed his discomfort. He needed to get himself under control, fast. As he moved over to the kitchen counter, he glanced at the bathroom door across the floor. It was locked shut. There wasn’t a single sound coming from it, not even the *drip-drip-drip* of a leaky tap.

Whilst the coffee brewed, he quickly slipped into some clothes for the sake of decency. He tugged on a dark-grey pullover and slipped into his favourite pair of distressed jeans. He even located his house slippers beneath the sofa, as one of the cats had been chasing them around and attacking them last night for fun. Probably Dabi, he liked causing mischief and ruining his shoes.

As soon as the coffee was brewed, Yoongi collected two mugs from the shelf above the sink. Then he carried the pot and mugs back upstairs. His legs still felt unsteady, so he had to go slowly to make sure he didn’t trip and spill the scalding-hot contents all down his front.

Taehyung had settled on the old sofa. It was torn up from many pairs of scratching claws, but it was still comfortable. This meant that Yoongi could take the armchair on the other side of the coffee table, his favoured seat of choice.

“I’ve got some good news, some very good news.” Taehyung shifted on the seat to fold one leg over the other. He didn’t sit like Yoongi did, with his leg placed over his other knee and his hands clasped on his kneecap. He liked to sit with leg cocked high and his ankle resting on his opposite knee instead. A masculine sitting position for sure. The kind that made him look mature and intellectual. Whenever he spread his arms out on the backrest of a sofa during interviews, it never failed to make his fans swoon. He was captivating, simply captivating. So much so that even his cats were unable to stop staring up at him.

Rather than ask, Yoongi just raised his eyebrows to tell him to continue whilst he poured out the coffee. It splashed down into the cups, the strong aroma wafting up to hit his nose. Just breathing it in made him feel wide awake. He placed the pot down, handed Taehyung his mug, and then he lowered himself down into the armchair with a deep grunt.

“The reversal procedure was a success. I’ve been getting tested every month for the past seven months now, and my sperm levels have been steadily increasing. It’s been such a long time since the original ... procedure, so there was some fear that it would be too late to effectively reverse it.

But my latest results show great progress. My sperm might be viable very soon.”

“Oh, yeah? That’s great, Tae,” Yoongi said with a soft smile. He really was happy for him; he knew just how much Taehyung had wanted to have children. It had been no secret, he had mentioned his longing for many, many years now. “That’s fuckin’ great, I’m so pleased for you.”

“I could be a dad, Yoongi.” Taehyung’s face lit up at this. There was a twinkle in his eyes and a beaming smile on his lips. His expression was so ecstatic that it made a tingling frisson erupt all up Yoongi’s arms. “It’s so close, I get shivers just thinking about it. It could really happen.”

“Who’s gonna be the surrogate?”

“Hoseok’s sister offered to carry the child for us. She’s not gifted, but that doesn’t matter. We don’t care if the baby is gifted or not. We just want a child. Eunseok offered to sign all the relevant paperwork. She’s still going to be the mother, but she will sign over the custody rights to me. They can’t stop her from doing so. It’s not illegal for a father to have full custody rights of his child, even if he’s gay. It just means that Hoseok won’t have the right to legally be recognised as their father too.”

With commercial surrogacy still illegal in the country, they had no choice but to go to such lengths in order to secure a child. Had Hoseok not legally changed his gender back when it had become legalised, they would have been able to slip through the system. But because of that one small – and yet momentous change – the option had been snatched right out of their fingers.

Yoongi couldn’t believe that they were living in a country that had made mutants into global celebrities, yet still had no basic legal rights for queer people. Well, there wasn’t much difference between them in the eyes of society. Many civilians thought they were both freaks of nature that should be shunned from society and stripped of their basic human rights.

Taehyung had told him about a theory that he had about the strangely high correlation between gifted and queer people. He believed that the reason why so many gifted people were queer was because it was an emerging form of evolution. An extreme survival mechanism birthed from extreme circumstances. After centuries of persecution and extermination all over the world, queer individuals had started evolving. The gifts gave them an edge that could protect them in times of need.

Yoongi thought it was mental as far as theories went.

And he *fucking* loved it.

Oh, how he wished that Taehyung would tell Namjoon about his ridiculous theory one day. The disappointed look on the other man's face because he had been made to listen to something so stupid might just kill him. He would finally kick the bucket, and he would do so laughing.

Hoseok had been granted one right, only to have a dozen more ripped out of his fingers. Yoongi knew that it was worth it for him in the end, but he still couldn't believe that he had been forced to make such a decision. As he nursed his mug of coffee, he asked, "And how does Hoseok feel about it? Not havin' the legal right to parentage and all that?"

"He's just as happy as I am. He would've been much happier if ... You know, if the circumstances were different and we could have our own child."

"He would've carried the child?" Yoongi asked in surprise. His eyebrows lifted, disturbing the mess of hair on his brow.

"Yes, he told me that he would've been happy to do it." Taehyung brought his mug to his lips to take a sip of coffee. He let out a pleased sound as he swallowed, savouring the flavour.

"Huh ... I didn't know he was comfortable with the idea."

"He wouldn't have been a few years ago. But time changes us, Yoongi. We all have these strong thoughts and feelings, only for them to evolve as we grow older and experience life. Sadly, the opportunity to experience such a wonderful miracle was stolen from us, like so many other things."

Yoongi hummed in agreement as he took his first sip of coffee. It was scalding-hot on his tongue, just the way he liked it. He swallowed it and dropped his gaze to study the box on the table. He wanted to sample some of the cake because it would be the polite thing to do. But he didn't want to create a situation where Taehyung would feel obliged to stay in his home. If he offered him some cake, he would have to stay until he had finished eating. So, it was best to not offer any temptations.

"Have you ever considered having the reversal procedure?" Taehyung suddenly asked, the question jolting him out of his musings about cake.

“Me? No, god no,” Yoongi said with a dry chuckle. He lifted his free hand to wave it, roughly brushing away the idea. “I, uh, I don’t want kids, Tae. I never felt the need to try and correct it.”

“You don’t feel ... impaired?”

“... No. Should I?”

“I’ve felt impaired since the day it happened. Like I’m not a full man, like something is missing.” Taehyung paused for a moment, as if he were gathering his thoughts. He gazed down into the dark depths of his coffee, his gaze as still as the rest of him. “Is that strange? Unhealthy?”

“I don’t think so. You had somethin’ stolen from you. We all did. I think most men would feel like their masculinity had been stripped from them after such a thing. I don’t think it’s unhealthy, but I do think that you need to understand that wasn’t what made you a man.”

“Hmm, and what makes me a man?”

“You’re a man because you feel like a man,” Yoongi stated matter-of-factly. “It doesn’t matter if you can’t conceive. Hell, it doesn’t matter if you had the entire works removed. Or if you never had them to begin with. You’re still a man, and no one can take that away from you.”

The air fell silent at this. It was so quiet that Yoongi heard the other man letting out an uneven exhale as he shifted on the seat. He studied him as he ran his thumb around the rim of his mug, watching the way that his prominent Adam’s Apple bobbed up and down as he tried to swallow. Rather than speak, he decided to savour the silence and drink the rest of his coffee. He knew that his friend wanted to speak, but he couldn’t find the right words to say. He just needed a moment to gather himself.

After some effort, Taehyung managed to speak. “... They were sick bastards.”

“Oh, don’t I know it.”

“To look at a bunch of teenagers and see us as threats. Threats so frightening that they needed to stop us from reproducing at all costs. There was zero research, zero-goddamn-research to support the risks of unstable gift mutation back then. I mean, it’s still classified as a theory to this date. Many in the scientific field believe it to be complete nonsense. Why did it have to be us? Why did

we have to be the first ones? Why did they make *us* the experiments?”

Yoongi had no answer to these questions. He had spent many years mulling it over, yet he had never found an answer that satisfied him. Simply, there was no satisfactory answer. No explanation would ever suffice. Nothing could ever fix the mistakes and heal the wounds.

The simplest answer to Taehyung’s questions was this: it had to happen to someone. If not them, then someone else. It was nothing personal, and that was the worst part about it.

They hadn’t suffered because of *who* they were, rather *what* they were.

When it became evident that Yoongi wasn’t going to reply, Taehyung sighed and asked, “I know you probably get this a lot, but I can’t not ask. Has he contacted you?”

“I’ll tell you what I told Koo just a few days ago – no. He ain’t contacted me once, not since he left. I’m sorry, man. I wish I could tell you somethin’ else. I wish I could give you that comfort of knowin’ that he’s safe, but I can’t.”

Taehyung’s expression didn’t shift at this, but Yoongi could sense that his spirits had just dropped straight through the floor. He could tell that he had been anticipating the blow, but deep down, he had been hoping that he would say something else. He pulled his lower lip in to gnaw on it as he gazed down into his mug. “Not once? Not even a text?”

“Nope. Why d’you guys always ask me? D’you have any idea how many times Koo shows up and scares the shit outta me just to ask questions about him?”

“He was your partner, Yoongi. It makes sense that he would contact you out of all of us.”

Yoongi let out a chuckle at this before he realised what his friend had just said. When it hit him, it felt like a seatbelt had bitten into his chest to stop him from flying head-first through a windshield. He shifted in his seat so fast that he almost sloshed coffee all over his lap, his mind flooding with a panicked rush of thoughts and screeching sirens.

“... How did y’know that?”

“What do you mean?”

“How did y’know that we ... that he was my partner?”

“He told me. The day after you had sex for the first time, he told me all about it.”

Yoongi was so stunned by this revelation that he couldn’t speak, he could only stare. His jaw was slack with shock, his tongue lying flat and useless in his mouth. He reached up to rub his hand over his face as he took a steadying breath, taking comfort from the warmth of his palm. It took him a whole minute to find the strength to ask, “Are you ... bein' serious?”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know that he hadn’t told you.” Taehyung held his hand up in a placatory gesture to show that he meant no harm or offence.

“You knew, this whole time?”

“Yes, but I didn’t tell anyone else, I promise.” Taehyung paused to let this sink in, to give him a moment to catch his breath. “The first time is a lot. We both know this. It’s like we’ve all discovered some big secret that no one else knows about. For some people, it feels like their entire world has changed. For others, it’s disappointing. They expected something different, something more special. For him, it had been a big deal. How was he supposed to keep it a secret from me? He couldn’t contain himself; he had needed to blurt it all out because he had been so excited about it.”

“... What was it like for you?” Yoongi asked in a quiet voice.

“For me? Nothing changed. I didn’t feel any different.” Taehyung gave a soft shrug and chuckled as he brought his mug up to his lips. “Hoseok felt a lot when we had sex for the first time. He had been scared, as you can imagine. But when it was over, he had told me that it hadn’t been bad, that it had only hurt a little. What about you? What was it like for you?”

Yoongi had never told anyone about that moment, not even Jimin.

That night when he had slipped his hand over the firm expanse of the other boy’s inner thigh and had felt him quivering from his touch.

That night, when Jimin had kissed him in the dark with such desperation that he had accidentally bumped their teeth together over and over.

That night, when he had allowed Jimin to slip his hand down the front of his combat pants and he had whispered against his lips, *“I’ve wanted to do this for so long, Yoongi.”*

That night, when Yoongi had experienced sexual pleasure for the first time. Pleasure so intense that it had washed over his aching body and filled the cracks in his broken soul with goodness.

When he spoke, his voice left his lips in a whisper, “... It felt like my eyes had opened for the very first time. It was like ... I’d been seein’ the world in shades of black and white, and suddenly, there was colour. There was this explosion of colour that I’d never seen before. Nothin’ was the same after that, my entire world changed. There was my life before him, and my life after him.”

Taehyung’s lips curled up at the corners in a fond smile as he listened to his description. He looked so happy, like he had touched his soul with his heartfelt words.

“What did he tell you? Did he tell you what it felt like for him?”

“He said that it felt like the world had stopped moving,” his friend said, his own voice soft and soothing. “He grabbed hold of me – his grip was so tight that it hurt my arms. He grabbed hold, and he leaned close and whispered, ‘Taehyungie, I’m not a kid no more.’”

Yoongi let out a chuckle at Taehyung’s accurate impression of young Jimin, with his strong Busan dialect. Within seconds, he was laughing. It had been so long since he had laughed in his company that he saw Taehyung’s eyes growing rounded with surprise.

“Like I said, it was a big deal for him. Oh, you both tried to be so slick back then. You thought we were all clueless. That we couldn’t see the little glances and touches. No offence, but you weren’t very good at hiding it.” Taehyung smiled and turned his head to look off across the lounge, his gaze shifting over the random assortment of cats that were present. As he flickered his eyes over them, he brought his cup back to his lips to swallow another deep sip of coffee.

Yoongi dropped his gaze to look at his own mug. There was nothing but the grinds left at the bottom, trapped in a small puddle of liquid. God, he needed a cigarette. He knew it wouldn’t be rude to light up around his friend because he still smoked. Unlike Namjoon and Seokjin, who had

tried – and succeeded in the former’s case – to kick the habit, Taehyung was still a dirty addict, just like him.

Talk about a stressful start to the day.

Taehyung lowered his cup from his lips and suddenly asked, “Yoongi, how many cats do you have?”

“Uh, 31,” he replied, placing his empty mug down on the table. “Why d’you ask?”

“... I can hear 34 heartbeats.”

Yoongi had just slipped his packet of cigarettes out of his pocket when his words hit him. It felt like he had walked straight into a wall. He was surprised that there wasn’t a loud *thump* because it felt like his words had punched him, like they had socked him right in the gut and stole the breath from his lungs. He slowly rolled his eyes up to hold his gaze, the battered packet crumpling in his hold.

Taehyung had cheated.

He had been using his enhanced hearing this entire time.

When he opened his mouth, Yoongi hoped that he sounded perplexed. He was certainly selling the confusion on his face. Not too much. He didn’t want to look concerned, simply confused. “Really? Are you sure?”

“I’m more than sure. Why can I hear an extra heartbeat?”

“Uh, it’s probably someone out on the street,” he suggested, as he thumbed open the packet.

“No, it’s definitely coming from the home,” Taehyung disagreed, shifting on the sofa seat. He cocked his head ever so slightly, his brow furrowing from the depth of his focus.

“Then it’s a rat in the wall.”

Taehyung gave him a look that told him they both knew it wasn’t a fucking rat. Even though Yoongi knew he should play it cool, he couldn’t help but pause in the act of collecting a cigarette. He didn’t know what to say, he was trapped in place and time was running out. Any second now and he would do it.

Taehyung’s eyes changed colour. It didn’t happen instantly; it took a few seconds. Slowly, a hint of gold started to diffuse out from his pupils, which washed over the dark depths of his irises. As it did so, his pupils dilated until they were significantly larger.

Shit.

Taehyung rapidly glanced over the lounge in search of the source of the noise. His gaze shifted to settle on the corner behind where Yoongi was sitting. He stared at the floor with such intensity that it was a miracle the wood didn’t start smouldering.

Rather than speak, Taehyung leapt to his feet and darted across the room.

Yoongi dived upright so fast that he slammed his shin into the coffee table. It nearly upended, almost spilled the mugs and cake box onto the floor. The cake would have been ruined, would have been smashed to pieces from the hard impact. He let out a curse but didn’t reach down to rub at his aching shin. “Wait, Taehyung. Wait, I can explain, I can—”

Taehyung shot him a look as he darted down the basement steps. He looked mad, he looked so mad that if looks could kill, Yoongi would have dropped dead in an instant. He disappeared out of sight a second later, leaving him with no choice but to race after him.

By the time that Yoongi reached the bottom of the staircase, Taehyung had already stormed across the lounge to draw closer to the bathroom. Despite his desperate pleading for him to stop, for him to just calm down and listen to him, he snagged hold of the door handle and wrenched on it hard enough to bust the lock. The door flew open hard enough to hit the opposite wall with a loud *bang*, which scared the cats and made them dart back up the staircase to hide.

Jimin was perched on the edge of the bathtub, with his arms folded across his bare chest and his toes stubbed against the ceramic tiles.

Taehyung stared at him without saying a single word. He was doing so with such intensity that Yoongi could feel the heat coming from his stare.

Then he suddenly slumped to the side, his breath leaving his lungs in a deep wheeze. His legs had failed him, had tried to spill him down to the floor. Taehyung reached up to clutch at the front of his shirt, right around where his heart was. He took several audible gasps for breath as he muttered, “Oh no, oh fuck, oh—”

Taehyung twisted away from Jimin because he didn’t seem able to look at him right now. He *recoiled*, like one would pull back from something horrific. Like a corpse ... or a ghost. In his haste to get away, he nearly tripped over his own feet.

“Taehyung, I can explain, I—”

Yoongi was shoved aside so hard that he felt his feet leaving the floor. A moment later, his back connected with the wall with enough force to drive the air right out of his lungs. The impact was so hard that a flare of pain erupted from his bad shoulder. He cried out in pain as he struggled to stay on his feet. His legs had suddenly lost the ability to support his weight. He felt his back sliding down the wall, but he managed to reach up and snag hold of one of the stair rails with his good arm before he hit the floor.

Taehyung had just tossed him through the air, caring not if he hurt him.

Like he was a criminal.

Yoongi craned his head back just in time to see the other man storming back up the basement steps, so he staggered to his feet to give chase. He had to crawl up the steps because he could barely stay upright. The blow had really knocked the wind out of him, and he wasn’t surprised to find his legs were shaking.

Taehyung was pacing back and forth across the lounge a few feet away from the front door. His hands were buried in his hair and his eyes were tightly squeezed shut.

“Taehyung, I’m sorry.” Yoongi was breathless, but not from fear. He was still winded from the rough shove. It was difficult pulling air into his lungs, but not as difficult as it was staying on his feet. “I’m so sorry, man.”

“I can’t believe this, I can’t– You *lied* to me!”

Taehyung twisted around to hold his gaze. His expression was difficult to read because there were so many emotions flitting across his features. First shock, then confusion, horror, disgust, and finally anger. He didn’t look relieved to have discovered that Jimin was alive and safe, he looked furious. He felt betrayed, not only by his best friend, but by him.

Six-years ... Taehyung hadn't seen his best friend in six-years. All those nights he had worried about him. All those failed attempts at trying to uncover his trail. And now he had just discovered him hiding in his basement, like a goddamn fugitive.

Of course he was going to feel betrayed. They were his friends, and they had stabbed him in the back.

Had Yoongi plunged a knife right into his chest, it probably would have hurt less.

At least he would have seen the knife coming.

“I asked you if you had spoken to him and you said no! You said that you haven’t seen him in years! And this whole-fucking-time, you knew where he was!”

“No, I didn’t. I swear that I didn’t know where he was,” Yoongi argued with a vigorous head shake. He stuck his tongue out to wet his lips and then took another quick gasp for breath. “Jimin showed up just a few days ago. He asked me to not tell anyone, not yet. He’s havin’ a hard time right now. He needs to settle down first, before he sees us all again. Please, listen to me. I *didn’t* know.”

“You should’ve told me! You should’ve called me the very second you knew he was safe!”

“I promised him I wouldn’t! Have some respect for his feelin’s! He’s a person, not a lost dog!”

“Do you know how much I’ve *ached* missing him?! Do you have any-fucking-idea, Yoongi?!”

“How the fuck d’you think I felt, huh?! Six-years, Taehyung! Six-goddamn-years without my own

partner! You think you suffered, huh?! Imagine what it felt like for me, you selfish bastard!”

Taehyung scoffed at this, his lips parting to show a hint of his teeth. It wasn't a grin, it was the snarl of a beast that was trapped in a corner. Or maybe it was a grimace of pain. Whatever it was, Yoongi didn't like seeing it on his face. It looked unstable.

Taehyung looked like he was going to smash his fist through the wall at any second.

Or his face.

“Don't tell me how much it hurt you! Don't you *fuckin'* dare!” Yoongi spat, as he gave his bad shoulder a quick roll. It twinged from the movement, so he reached up to shove his hand under his armpit to support it. “I've had enough sufferin' to last me a lifetime. I don't need you dumpin' more on me. You ain't gonna get no sympathy from me, I got none to give.”

“I'm not asking for sympathy, you fool,” Taehyung muttered. He shot him a sidelong glare that reeked of disgust. “For God's sake. You've spent too long around the dead. You're so detached from humanity that I'm surprised you even know what emotions are these days.”

Yoongi let out a bark of a laugh. His words had stung him, had stung him more than Taehyung could have possibly known. But he wasn't going to give him the pleasure of knowing that he had wounded him.

Taehyung stopped pacing around the room. His hands were still buried in his hair, which he was furiously working between his fingers. He took a moment to get his frantic breathing back under control, and then he slipped a hand free from his tangled locks so he could push his glasses back up his nose.

“I need to talk to him,” Taehyung said, his voice low and serious. He smoothed at the front of his shirt to neaten up his appearance. He looked so harried right now, his hair messy and his clothing wrinkled in all the wrong places. It was so different to how he usually looked – so neat, always exuding a soothing calm.

“Go ahead, I ain't gonna stop you,” Yoongi muttered, moving aside to let him go down the staircase.

Taehyung made his way back down the stairs and into the basement at a quick pace. Jimin had left the bathroom whilst they had been arguing. He was standing in the kitchen, with his shoulders slouched so he could rest his hands on the counter and hang his head. He didn't look up at the sound of their footsteps, he just stared down into the empty sink with a hard to read expression.

Though he had claimed that he needed to talk to him, Taehyung didn't seem able to find the words that he wanted to say. He was standing behind Jimin, there was just a few feet between them. His gaze was focused on the muscular plane of his bare spine, right where his tanned skin turned into glossy and pale scars that stretched across the sharp juts of his scapula. His fingers were fidgeting at his shirt cuffs, and he was chewing on his lower lip.

Yoongi lingered on the bottom step. He didn't want to get too close because he felt like he was intruding on their private moment. But he knew that he needed to be present for this conversation. Jimin needed him to act as a mediator for the first time in a very long time. He was no longer the one that would jump between their waging squad mates to break up an argument before blows ended up being exchanged.

It was Jimin that finally broke the silence. His voice was low and husky, raw with emotion, as he said, "I owe you an apology. I owe you all an apology. But you, Taehyung ... I put you through hell and for that I'm sorry."

"Why didn't you tell me? Why did you run away like that?"

"I'm not apologising for disappearing. That's not something I need to be sorry for. I'm apologising for hurting you." Jimin shifted to lean back against the counter. "I needed to get away, Tae. Telling you about what was going on in my head back then, that wasn't an option. I didn't even tell Yoongi. I left in the middle of the night; he didn't know a thing until I was long gone."

Yoongi saw the way that Taehyung's gaze shifted to look over at him. He did so discreetly, but not discreetly enough. He tried to not let his face shift, but a brief flicker of surprise made his eyes widen at the corners before he got his expression back under control.

"He's telling you the truth, so please don't take your anger out on him. If you want to hurt someone, then hurt me. I was the one that hurt you, so I deserve it."

"I can't hurt you, Jimin," Taehyung said, his voice barely that of a whisper. "I could never hurt you; you know that."

Jimin thought this over, and then he folded his arms across his chest. The movement drew attention to his hand, which was still covered in a thick layer of gauze and bandages. Taehyung's gaze dropped to study it and then lifted back up to his face. But then he seemed to realise what he was looking at, so his eyes flickered down once more.

"Jimin ... what happened to your hand?"

"I burned it," Jimin replied without missing a beat. His tone was flat and devoid of emotion.

"And how did you burn it?"

"What do you think, Tae?"

"... You didn't."

Taehyung's expression dropped at this. His lips shifted first, the corners pulling down as his lips parted to form a soft 'o.' His cheeks turned slack, and then his eyes widened at the corners until they were rounded and wide. The air in the basement plummeted by several degrees. Yoongi felt his skin turning cold just looking at him. He had no choice but to look away because he felt himself coming over nauseous. It felt like he had just been punched in the throat. No matter how much he tried to swallow, he found that he couldn't do so. He couldn't even gulp down the foul-tasting spit that had flooded his mouth.

"Please, Jimin. Please tell me that you didn't."

Jimin lifted his head so he could look down his nose at him. There was a defiant look on his face that showed he wasn't going to be made to feel shame or regret for his actions. He was proud of what he had done, and he wanted his best friend to know it.

Taehyung held his gaze for a few seconds, and then he reached up to cover his mouth with one of his hands. He took a step back and twisted away from his best friend as he took a deep and slow inhale through his nose. Yoongi was convinced that he was going to vomit all down his front, but he managed to get himself under control.

"... You stupid bastard," Taehyung whispered. When he lowered his hand, there was a grin on his lips. But it was not from amusement; it didn't extend to his eyes. "You actually did it. You killed

them, didn't you?"

Jimin didn't reply to this question, he just held his gaze.

"I knew it was you. I *knew* it, but I kept pushing it down because I didn't want to assume the worst of you. I know you, Jimin. I know you better than I know myself and I know you're a good man. You didn't ... you wouldn't do that. I know you wouldn't."

"... I did it, Tae. I killed them – Choi, Kim, Oh and Yoo."

Taehyung's lips dragged down at the corners in a pained grimace as he asked, "Why?"

"They deserved it."

Taehyung scoffed at this and turned to look over at him. Though Yoongi couldn't be certain, there was something on his face that seemed to ask him if he agreed with this statement. If he thought that their abusers deserved to be burned alive. That they had deserved such an agonising death. Yoongi didn't say anything, he just held his gaze until he looked away again.

"So, you're just taking the law into your own hands now? Is that what you're doing? You thought we weren't doing enough as a team, so you broke us up and, what, became a vigilante?"

"It had nothing to do with the team, Tae. I had to leave because I was dangerous. I was scared that I would hurt one of you."

"Why did you kill them?"

"I just told you, they deserved it."

"*And who gave you the right to do that?!*" Taehyung snapped. His voice escaped him in a sudden shout that made Yoongi jump. He couldn't help but gasp in shock because he had such strong lungs that his shout was shockingly loud. A sonic boom filled with anger.

“I gave myself the right because I knew no one else would,” Jimin argued. He was still talking in a low and steady voice. He had refused to raise the volume to a shout because he didn’t want to get angry at his best friend. But there was a prominent vein starting to ripple down the side of his neck from his tightly clenched jaw that showed he was struggling to keep himself under control.

“No, you don’t get to decide that!” Taehyung twisted away from him to start pacing back and forth again, like he always did when he was angry and upset. “The things they did to us! The things they did to you, to me, to Hoseok – to all of us! Why should you be the one to decide what happens to them?! You didn’t think about us and what we wanted! You took that option away from us! That isn’t fair!”

Yoongi asked, “Would you have done it, Tae?”

“That isn’t the point!”

“But it is. Jimin did what he had to do because none of us would. I know that. Y’know that. We all know that. We all want them dead. But wantin’ doesn’t make it happen.”

Taehyung let out a frustrated sound at this, but he didn’t argue with him. He rubbed his face with his hands and brokenly groaned. “I can’t believe this. Why are you siding with him, Yoongi? Can’t you see how mad this all is?”

“We’re all mad here, Tae,” Yoongi retorted, shifting to lean back against the wall. “There ain’t a sane man in this room.”

“Jimin ... they’re going to find you. The Agency is going to find you and they’ll kill you for this. They’ll kill you before you kill them.”

“I’m not going to give them the chance. I’m going to keep killing until there’s no one left. I’m going to kill Doctor Son next.” Jimin stuck his bare chest out in defiance, his shoulders held high just like his head. “If you want to help me, then help me. If not, leave. That’s all I have to say to you right now, Tae.”

Taehyung fell silent at this. He didn’t storm out of the basement, he lingered in place for a few minutes. In that time, he stared down at the floor and slowly rubbed his fingers over his brow as if nursing a headache. When he left, he did so without saying a word, without looking at either of them. The sound of him pulling the front door shut reverberated throughout the house.

“You shouldn’t have told him about Doctor Son,” Yoongi pointed out. “What if he tells Namjoon about your plans?”

“He’s not going to tell Namjoon,” Jimin replied with a staunch head shake. “I know Taehyung better than anyone else. He’s not going to tell him about the plan, and he’s not going to blow my cover.”

“Jimin, I understand why you might think that. But you need to be realistic here. After everythin’, you dunno what he’s gonna do. He—”

“He won’t do it,” Jimin reiterated, placing serious emphasis on each word to drive the point home.

Yoongi wanted to argue against this, but he knew it was best to hold his tongue. His partner was upset by what had just happened and he needed to give him space. More pressing and prodding would only make him explode, and when Jimin exploded, he had a habit of exploding everything around him.

Would Taehyung keep their illicit secret?

Yoongi really didn’t know. He wanted to think that their friend would stay by their side, even through times as difficult and shocking as these. He hoped that he would think about how much Jimin had done for them over the years and decide to not expose his location and murderous confession to Namjoon and the police. After everything he had been through with them, *for them*, Jimin deserved their support, not their judgement.

But maybe he didn’t know Taehyung as well as he thought he did.

Considering how much he had suffered without Jimin these past six-years, Taehyung might be resentful. He might be so angry with him for causing him so much pain that he would go running to Namjoon and tell him everything. He might do so for petty revenge. He might do so because he believed it was the right thing to do. He might want to stop Jimin before he ended up destroying himself. Before The Agency got their hands on him and put him down like a rabid dog.

There was a constant sense of apprehension and dread hanging in the air for the rest of the day. Yoongi was so on edge that he couldn’t eat. He could barely stomach drinking coffee because his stomach wouldn’t stop roiling beneath his ribs. Swallowing the bitter substance made him want to

gag. He wanted to focus on something to try and ignore his creeping anxiety, but he couldn't do so. His mind just kept wandering back to that look on Taehyung's face.

That look of abject horror that had come over his face when it had dawned on him that Jimin had murdered four men.

Four men that had made their lives living hell since they were children, who had abused them in ways that had left irrevocable scars on their bodies and minds.

Jimin decided to funnel all his energy into exercise. He started working out shortly after Taehyung had left, and he carried on doing so for several hours without taking a single break. He forced himself to focus on crunches and push-ups, to grimace and count through the pain because it gave him something else to focus on. He produced so much heat that Yoongi started sweating from the sudden spike in temperature. His skin became so slick with sweat and flushed with colour that the basement was filled with the scent of his salty, smoky perspiration.

After sharing a silent dinner and washing up, they retired to bed in the late evening. Many hours had passed, and yet no one had come knocking on the door to apprehend Jimin. It seemed that Taehyung had yet to act, that he had decided to not share their secret with Namjoon or anyone else just yet. It might take him a couple of days to do so ... or he might decide to keep their secret close to his chest.

Only time would tell.

Lying in bed, with his head resting on the strong curve Jimin's outstretched biceps and a smouldering cigarette lazily perched between his lips, Yoongi was starting to feel his nerves relaxing at long last.

And then there came a sudden series of pounds on the door upstairs.

The noise made him jolt upright in shock. His cigarette almost dropped from his lips to land in his lap. He fumbled to catch it and then twisted to look down at Jimin.

Jimin looked on edge, looked frightened for the first time all day. He held his gaze and then glanced over at the stairs. He was silently telling him to answer the door. Whilst he did so, he would probably try and force his way out through the small window across the floor to escape.

Yoongi held his gaze for a moment, and then he slowly shifted to get to his feet. As he made his way across the floor and up the stairs, he started to hear tinny ringing in his ears. His feet suddenly felt heavy, and his legs were too weak to lift them up to take a step.

It had been years since he had felt fear like this. He didn't feel like an adult. He felt like a child. A small and defenceless child that had no control over the nightmarish world they were trapped within.

Yoongi took a deep breath as he unlocked the door. He held it in his lungs and took hold of the handle. Then he dragged the door inwards to reveal who was waiting on the other side.

It wasn't Namjoon, standing on the porch in his smart day suit with his NPA badge held up in front of his chest and a grim expression on his face.

It wasn't an armed officer, ready to knock him aside and storm the home with their squad to try and arrest the dangerous killer that was hiding down in the basement.

Taehyung was standing on the porch.

To his left was Hoseok.

To his right was Jungkook.

In the evening darkness, Yoongi couldn't clearly see their faces. All he could see were their dark eyes, which gleamed back at him, reflecting the dim light that was bleeding up from the staircase across the lounge. He was so stunned that he couldn't even speak, couldn't ask them what was going on.

When Taehyung spoke, his voice was low and serious enough to make a shudder run down Yoongi's spine. "We want in ..."

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